

all woke up one day  
in a perfect world  
whether we would be  
perfect. ~~or if it would~~  
~~be~~ For me — and  
I guess it has become  
more pronounced  
since I've been in MCC  
that I believe that our  
faith is always  
composed of 2 elements:  
Methodists would  
understand the terms:  
justification + justice —  
or sanctification + social  
justice. We cannot  
have one without the  
other. — and it is our faith

Other - one in one lot  
have our contract for  
justice. We cannot  
on another side of  
- justice & justice -  
understand the terms:  
with justice under  
comparisons of elements:  
fact is always  
that I believe that our  
since we have in the  
these positions  
I guess it has become  
the former and  
perfectly satisfied  
under the terms of  
in a perfect manner  
all work up our day

our ability to believe  
that which we cannot  
see that makes both  
possible. Our belief -  
our faith - are not  
based on what we can  
intellectually know,

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## Salted Peanuts

I once heard Geri Harvey, who, by the way, is doing better, preach on "Canned Nuts" - and talk about the avg. <sup>McC</sup> Church as a variety of nuts - especially as in most canned nuts if you get ripped off regularly as I do - as peanuts - common ordinary nuts - while there were some really specialized nuts - Choice nuts among us. Well, I'm not going to steal Geri's sermon - but am

# Letter Parents

I once heard that Henry  
Wells, of the way, is doing better  
general on "Letter Parents" -  
and that about the way.  
I think on a variety  
of ways - especially  
as in most cases with  
it goes right off  
regardless as to be - as  
present - common  
ordinary ways - while  
there have been really  
specialized ways -  
which are more  
going to be the way  
better - but now

going to hitchhike on  
something I was reading  
in The Gospel According  
to Peanuts, which I  
recommend highly.

Linus - the little fellow  
w/ the blanket, and  
Snoopy are fighting for  
Linus' <sup>security</sup> blanket - and  
Snoopy finally gets an end  
of it & begins to rumple  
the door - when he  
comes up short & finds  
that Linus has nailed  
it to the floor! Linus,  
of course, like most of  
us wants everything  
nailed down. He needs

rails down. He needs  
new mounts everything  
of course, like most of  
it to the floor! Jim,  
that Jim has mailed  
corner up short & finds  
the door - when he  
of it & begins to pump  
Joey finally gets around  
Jim's blanket - and  
Joey are fighting for  
3 the blanket, and  
Jim - the little fellow  
recommends right.  
to account. which &  
in the hospital teaching  
something 3 more reaching  
going to textbooks on

his religious security  
all neat & tidy & where  
he can get at it. Thomas  
was a little like that.  
But Christianity is always  
a little (a lot) ambiguous.  
It's awfully hard to ex-  
plain concepts like  
God as divinity + humanity  
existing in one person;  
it's certainly difficult  
to explain the Resurrection  
or the incarnation; it's  
no easy thing to explain  
the Trinity - ask me -  
I've just taken a fancy  
course in the History of  
Christian Doctrine & if I



his religious security

all men & things & nations  
he can get at it. Others  
know little like that.

But Christianity is always

a little (a lot) mysterious.

It's awfully hard to ex-

plain concepts like

God as divinity & humanity

existing in one person.

It's certainly difficult

to explain the Resurrection

on the Resurrection; it's

no easy thing to explain

the Trinity - not now -

I've just taken a fourth

course in the history of

Christian doctrine & of



thought I was confused  
before, I ~~to~~ now know  
more about heresies  
I'd never heard of than  
I ever wanted to know -  
But I've also been on  
a path of discovery that  
leaves me amazed at the  
thinking of men & women  
who were just names to  
me. One - Schleiermacher -  
has opened a whole world  
of thinking for me.

Back to Linn -  
Charlie is talking to  
him in one strip - "So  
you think the world is  
getting better? Well, if

getting better? Well, if  
you think the word is  
thin in one strip - "so  
Charlie is talking to  
Bob to bring -  
of thinking for me.  
has opened a whole world  
me. One. All this  
who were first women to  
thinking of men & women  
because we brought at the  
a part of discovery that  
But I've also been on  
I ever wanted to know -  
I'd never heard of them  
know a lot of things  
before, I ~~the~~ now know  
things I now confused

you have so much confidence in the world's getting better, how come you hang on to that blanket? all Limes can say is "Touché!" Limes has confidence in what he can touch, but when one wants to remove his blanket - well, that's another story. There is rationality in Limes which asserts itself over & over — and there is rationality in us that says - with Thomas - unless I put my fingers in the wounds I cannot believe. So Thomas has to be con-

As Thomas has to be con-  
sidered I cannot help  
I put my fingers in the  
pulp - with Thomas - when  
rationality is so that  
I over - and there is  
which asserts itself over  
rationality in human  
another story. There is  
his blanket - well, that's  
when one wants to remove  
what he can touch, but  
Thomas has confidence in  
all things as say in "Touch-  
you have or to that blanket?  
getting better, how come  
you have no mouth con-  
fidence in the world's

vinces by the presence of  
Jesus - and looks + touches.  
We are not so lucky. How  
can I tell you that the  
resurrected Jesus lives in  
our midst + be certain  
that I am not lying -  
or that the women at  
the tomb that we read  
about last week were not  
lying?

Charlie Brown + Lucy are  
walking down the road.  
Lucy says: "Sooner ~~or~~ later  
Charlie Brown, there is one  
thing you're going to  
have to learn... You reap  
what you sow! You get



What you see! You see  
have to leave... You trap  
thing you're going to  
Charlie Brown, there is the  
trap say: "Cover <sup>up</sup> later  
nothing about the road.  
Charlie Brown & Lucy are  
lying?"

about how much movement  
the town that we read  
or that the women at  
that I am not lying -  
own mother & her sister  
interested from living in  
can I tell you that the  
there are not so lucky. How  
years - and both & friends.  
vines by the presence of

out of life exactly what  
you put into it! No more,  
no less!! - Snoopy has  
been listening - he  
turns + walks away, "I'd  
like to see a little more  
margin for error!" We  
don't want to know that  
the rewards of our faith  
are in proportion to the  
amount of faith we have.

There are 2 barriers  
generally to ~~God~~ our  
understanding the Xian  
message 1. The intellectual  
barrier. We are not sure  
what the alternatives are -  
for or against believing

one of life exactly what  
you put into it! The more,  
the more!! - I suppose has  
been listening - he  
turns + looks around, "Oh"  
lets to see a little more  
margin for error!" We  
don't want to know that  
the removal of our faith  
occurs proportion to the  
amount of faith we have.  
There are a number  
generally to ~~be~~ seen  
understanding the Xian  
message: the intellectual  
barrier. We are not sure  
what the alternatives are -  
for or against believing

because we seldom hear  
the entire Xtion message  
in one place at one time.  
The second difficulty is  
with our hearts rather  
than our heads. J. D.  
Salinger once said that  
"we are constitutionally  
unable to love or under-  
stand any child of God  
who throws tables around!"  
Christ says "you shall indeed  
hear but never understand,  
& see but not perceive."  
For your heart has grown  
dull & your ears heavy  
of hearing, & your eyes  
closed, but you perceive

Chorus, how soon we come

of learning, & your eyes

all & your ears heard

God your heart has grown

& you are not far from

has the power understood,

Christ say "you shall inherit

who know the power of

about our kind of God

unable to love or under-

"We are constitutionally

Goliath we said that

than our heads. J.D.

with our hearts rather

the second difficulty is

in our place or our time.

the entire Christian message

because we seldom hear



# The Universal Fellowship

5

Likewise with talking in church or gossiping out loud when others are trying to meditate or ~~pray~~ pray.

~~Please remember where you are and exercise consideration of other people's feelings.~~

These may seem like petty things not worthy of mention, but it is through small things that marriages rise to heaven or sink into the sea, and the same is true with churches and other groups. Please don't make an usher or a board member have to speak to you. Just be considerate, and the details will take care of themselves.

~~These may indeed seem like small things, but this Sunday experience here is our main one of the week. What happens here is important, but also what we bring to the place and what we take from it.~~

OT Welcoming the sojourner.

3. There's another concern I want to raise here tonight, and I'd love to hear some comment and feedback on it. That's the way we relate to people who are not really active in our community or in our church.

churches

of  
studies

, having  
to pursue

Church

rected

by a

to

or the

ch

It

at

ch

univ, episcopal regarding  
local missions & study  
(small, new churches)  
groups and synodical

likewise with talking in church  
or gossiping out loud when others  
are trying to meditate or pray.  
Please remember where you are and  
exercise consideration of other  
people's feelings.

These may seem like petty things  
not worthy of mention, but it is  
through small things that marriages  
rise to heaven or sink into the sea,  
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and other groups. Please don't make  
an usher or a board member have to  
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things, but this Sunday  
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important, but also what we bring to  
take place and what we take from it.

There's another concern I want to  
raise here tonight, and I'd love to  
hear some comment and feedback on it.  
That's the way we relate to people  
who are not really active in our  
community or in our church.

of learning, & upon eyes  
closed, but upon for care

The Universal Fellowship

Metropolitan Community Churches  
(U.F.M.C.C.) is a group of  
± 150 churches <sup>with</sup> headquartered  
in Los Angeles, California, having  
its main ministry in & to persons  
<sup>in</sup> the gay community.

Metropolitan Community Churches  
(M.C.C.) <sup>bodies</sup> are loosely connected  
internationally ~~through~~ by a  
polity which attempts to  
take into consideration the  
broad range of church  
governance systems. It  
<sup>has</sup> ~~is~~ congregational polity at  
the local chartered church  
level, episcopal regarding  
local missions & study  
<sup>(small, new churches)</sup>  
groups and synodical

the following factors  
the spiritual community  
(W.C.C.) is a group of  
no churches with  
in the higher education, having  
its main activity in the form  
the gay community  
Metropolitan Community Church  
(M.C.C.) are largely connected  
inter-nationally through a  
group which attempt to  
take into consideration the  
broad range of Church  
performance system. As  
no correspondence with  
the local church  
local spiritual regarding  
local mission & study  
(Council, New Church)  
groups and organizations

at the district, ~~and~~ national  
and international levels.

There are H.C.C.'s throughout  
the United States -- ~~also~~ at least  
~~one~~ ~~in~~ ~~one~~ ~~to~~ ~~every~~ ~~large~~ ~~city~~, ~~and~~  
~~many~~ ~~in~~ after 3-4 in  
major metropolitan areas, ~~or~~  
with a beginning outreach  
into medium-sized cities  
and suburban areas.

Additionally, MCC's are  
located in 6 cities in England,  
10 in Canada, a cluster of  
6 among Christian Brafans  
in Nigeria, ~~and~~ 5 in  
Australia and one each in  
~~Campania~~ <sup>Pennsylvania</sup>, New Zealand, So.  
Africa, Mexico, Puerto Rico,



at the bottom, and material  
and horizontal bands.  
There are 10 C.C. throughout  
the United States - ~~and~~ at least  
~~one~~ one to every larger city, some  
every 100 ft. after 3 ft. in  
major stratification areas.  
with a beginning outside  
into the main body of the  
and abundant areas.  
additionally, 100 ft. are  
located in 10 ft. in England  
10 in Canada, a cluster of  
1 among Christian groups  
in the region, ~~and~~ 3 in  
Central and one each in  
France, the United States,  
Spain, Mexico, Puerto Rico,

with requests, <sup>for churches</sup> from Brazil, Germany, South India, and even Paland having been received. A slogan from the gay community seems applicable to gay Christians, "We are everywhere." Four MCC's are conducted entirely in Spanish within the U.S., and U.F.M.C.C. maintains a ~~translated~~ bureau to translate church materials into ~~both~~ Spanish <sup>+ Portuguese</sup> ~~+ French~~ for use in the Hispanic Americas. Presently, the U.F.M.C.C. is seeking denominational status with the National Council of Churches of Christ in America. MCC does not consider itself a sect



## Bylaws

but, according to its By-Laws  
sect. — —, states that "we move  
in the ~~main~~<sup>stream</sup> of Christianity.  
Our faith is based upon the  
historic creeds, ..." ①

~~This paper will attempt  
to trace some of ways in  
which U.C.C.'s doctrinal  
position and~~

While a church like U.C.C.  
is ~~a~~ certainly a phenomena  
of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and  
~~certainly~~ parallels the gay  
liberation movement, the  
probability exists that a  
church with U.C.C.'s open  
stance toward homosexuality  
and by extension to sexuality  
itself would have evolved

but, according to the by-laws  
of the church, stating that we were  
in the maintenance of the church.  
The fact is that we have the  
right to do so.

~~This paper will attempt  
to show that we are  
not in violation of the  
constitution of the church.~~

While a church like the U.C.C.  
is certainly a fellowship  
of the 20th Century, and  
certainly friendly to the  
liberation movement, the  
question exists that in  
church with the U.C.C. in  
order to have fellowship  
and to have to recognize  
itself as a church.



~~2nd~~ Teal, Donn: The Gay Militants;  
Stein & Day, N.Y. 1971, pp. 278, 17.

at some time <sup>in history</sup> ~~within the~~  
~~20th century~~, even without  
Gay liberation. ~~The fact that~~  
MCC was founded (10/6/68)  
prior to the Christopher  
Street riot following the  
police raid on the Stonewall  
Inn, <sup>(6/28-29/69)</sup> ~~was an~~ indicating  
~~that the~~ <sup>a</sup> need for gay  
Christians to organize existed  
~~was at least beginning~~  
~~to surface~~ even before the  
actual outburst which dates  
the beginning of the Gay  
liberation movement. <sup>(2nd)</sup> At  
the present time <sup>over</sup> ~~approximately~~  
15,000 people <sup>hold active memt.</sup> ~~belong~~ <sup>to</sup> M.C.C.  
with ~~over~~ that many again  
as attenders and <sup>communicants</sup> ~~congregants~~



$$\frac{1}{6} \quad 25 \times 300 = 7500$$

$$\frac{1}{6} \quad 25 \times 100 = 2500$$

$$\frac{1}{3} \quad 50 \times 35 = 1750$$

$$\frac{1}{3} \quad 50 \times 20 = \frac{1000}{12750}$$



③ Bylaws -

④ Bylaws

and another 10,000 inactive members due to their ~~living~~ living in areas where there are no local <sup>MCC</sup> churches established. MCC polity states that "inac. memb<sup>s</sup>." <sup>official</sup> see — —, <sup>3</sup> so that repastage ~~of membership~~ represents active attending, (registered members) ~~persons~~. Additionally, people who are not Christians or doctrinally opposed to U.C.C.'s fairly conservative <sup>Christian</sup> stance (i.e. Jews, Unitarians, Mormons, etc.) often join as "Friends of the Church" and are active in the congregation but are not counted as members. <sup>(4)</sup>





⑤ ??? Rose S. Ellwood: ~~to~~

⑥ ~~gay bible~~ One Way: The Jesus Mot  
+ its meaning. Paen Hall: Englewood Cliffs,  
N.J.

⑦ Ronald H. Ensoth + Herald E. Jamison  
The gay church: ~~Edwards~~, Jr. Rep. 1974-1973  
MCC ~~and~~ began in 1968 with

12 people meeting in Tray  
Perry's living room. <sup>By the end</sup> ~~within~~  
9/1970

~~2 years~~ there were 4 churches

(SF, SD + Chi) ~~and by the end~~

~~of 1970~~ <sup>with</sup> ~~there were~~ 500 members

and 100 ~~clergy~~ friends. MCC in

1975 was described as the

"fastest growing church in  
the U.S. — with the exception  
of Rev. Sun Jung Moon's Unification  
Church." (5)

MCC has been praised  
as "an idea whose time had  
come", <sup>(6)</sup> has been castigated  
as a mockery <sup>(7)</sup>, ~~and accepted~~  
~~as a part of~~ and denounced  
within the gay community



as traitors.<sup>⑧</sup> MCC often  
finds itself in a no-win  
position, disapproved of  
by the ~~the~~ majority of  
Christian Churches; distrusted  
by political radicals within  
the gay community;  
ridiculed by Fundamentalists;  
and caught internally <sup>in conflict</sup> between  
its <sup>own</sup> liberal & conservative  
members. Yet, M.C.C. goes  
on, continuing to grow and  
constantly touching new lives.  
Why?

This paper will attempt  
to show that the doctrines  
& practices of M.C.C. which  
make it unique & which





give it strength are rooted  
~~much~~ deeply in a number  
of traditions springing from  
the Radical Reformation <sup>of the 16th Century</sup> and  
~~that~~ though these roots  
have <sup>branched &</sup> flowered in different  
directions through the centuries,  
in M.C.C. they return <sup>to</sup> ~~to their~~  
~~Radical roots and give~~  
<sup>give</sup> the strength & power which  
supports both the individual  
communicant & the local  
Church.

Rev. Tray Perry, the Founder  
and current Moderator of the  
U.F.M.C.C. <sup>was raised in a</sup> ~~comes from~~ South  
Florida Pentecostal & Baptist  
background. Nearly <sup>40%</sup> ~~40%~~

give it strength and roots  
to supply in a number  
of locations appearing here  
the local information and  
that through these roots  
have flowers in different  
directions through the continent,  
in the early history of this  
~~continent and give~~  
the strength & power which  
supports both the individual  
community & the local  
church.

Rev. T. J. Hays, the founder  
and current leader of the  
U. S. C. C. ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> based in a  
local church & district  
local church. <sup>40%</sup>

of MCC ministers are from  
Baptist traditions, another  
40% are from Methodist  
tradition, ~~the two largest~~  
~~groups represented among~~  
~~clergy in M.C.C.~~ Catholics,  
Pentacostals, Presbyterians,  
Anglicans, United Church of  
Christ and a sprinkling  
of many <sup>denominations</sup> ~~make~~  
<sup>remain</sup> <sup>membership of the</sup> up the professional ministry  
of M.C.C. Since the local  
Church tends to reflect the  
~~theological stance~~ style of the minister, and often  
the personal theology of ~~the~~  
individual clergy, it is often  
difficult to speak for the  
entire denomination; however



There are certain general areas of agreement as formulated in the By-laws & Statement of Faith of the Fellowship, published by the U.F.M.C.'s Commission on Faith, Fellowship & Order, and published by the Fellowship in the Founder's autobiography "The Lord Is My Shepherd & He Knows I'm Gay." Additionally, there are certain practices and unwritten tenets usual to most M.C.C.s which give M.C.C. worship a decided flavor, unique to the denomination.





and which enable a participant to feel at home in an UCC whether one encounters it in Copenhagen, London, N.Y. Adelaide or Los Angeles.

For the purpose of this paper three main divisions will be used, <sup>to reflect the theological/doctrinal stance of U.C.C.</sup>

1. Doctrine / Statement of Faith
2. Tenets <sup>in Sermon</sup> ~~of the U.C.C.~~
3. Worship practices.

By-laws/

### Statement of Faith

The U.F.M.C.C. Statement of Faith (Appendix A) is a document brought up to date every 4 years at the



General Conference of U.F.M.  
C.C., ~~passed by~~ ~~noted report~~ ~~by~~ a bi-  
cameral process requiring  
~~73~~ <sup>66%</sup> ~~66%~~ vote of both clergy  
& lay delegates to the Conference.  
The first by-laws were passed  
in 1970 and have been  
~~updated~~ amended con-  
stantly through the Conference  
of 1983. ~~At that time,~~ A  
Committee of 10 persons drawn  
from the varying backgrounds  
in UCC, women, men, black,  
Hispanic and representing  
as broad a spectrum as  
possible were commissioned  
to put the statement of  
Faith in non-generic





language, ~~and~~ <sup>at the Conference,</sup> with further  
amendments, the current  
Statement of Faith is the  
adaptation of the original  
By-law Statement as  
amended through MCC's  
13 year history and  
placed in inclusive language.  
One gendered word, "Son",  
was insisted upon by  
the conservative wing.

As <sup>the Statement</sup> now worded, U.F. M.C.C.  
<sup>traditional</sup> is a, trinitarian body, which  
accepts the inspiration of  
Scripture, ~~the~~ divine/human  
Christ, justification by  
faith, two sacraments  
(Eucharist & baptism), and



exhorts Christians to a life of prayer & good works to demonstrate gratitude for God's work in their lives.

Since the statement is to be affirmed by Christians of many denominational backgrounds, it is deliberately broad, and follows mainline Christian thought, with only one deviation to include the baptism of the Holy Spirit as well as baptism by water. The average MCC ~~member~~ <sup>minister</sup> would affirm ~~adult baptism~~ <sup>immersion</sup> of <sup>adult</sup> believers and would be unlikely to espouse the



baptism of infants, although there is no prohibition of this practice. Many MCC ministers would probably not baptize infants from a conscience stance but would co-counsel parents to dedicate their children & baptize them at a later time. (Answers <sup>question concerning baptism;</sup> to an MCC Proficiency Examinations, 1981.)

MCC's understanding of the Eucharist is as a symbol, not a sacrifice, one pointing to the salvific message of the + and conveying to us God's love & forgiveness.









## THE PARADOX OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas, to me, is always a series of paradoxes. We are asked to come to the stable and worship an infant, and so we go to department stores and buy expensive gifts for people who often do not like or even know very well. We are asked to wonder -- like the shepherds -- and we become cynical and talk about how commercial it is all becoming. We are asked to look into the heaven for a sign, and we look in our pay envelopes for bonuses. We are told not to fear, and our anxiety level becomes overwhelming as we wonder who we've forgotten, offended, not bought enough for, or went overboard on. We are told to be at peace, and we find ourselves in a world where every day brings us a rumor of a new war, a new assault on human worth, a new repression of human liberty --- and we are told our liberator, our savior, our redeemer has once again entered the world. Be at peace, be joyful, be quiet.

How can we? My very esteemed grandmother -- the matriarch of our clan -- was a wonderful Hungarian woman. She had come to America as a young girl with a group of German Baptist Brethren, better known as Dunkers. She had been a farm girl and milked cows and brought the milk out to the road where the pasturizing plant picked up the milk and took it off to be bottled. My grandfather drove the cart for the pasturizing plant, and they met at the roadside. My grandmother never really left Hungary, however; in her heart, she always lived by the old ways and ate the old foods, and spent Christmas being very, very Hungarian. It was a time for her of touching into her roots and sharing them with our family. And we were grateful, for even in the depths of the Depression, we were wonderfully fed at Christmas -- and warmed by the old customs. We listened eagerly to the tale of Babushka on January 6th -- having one more Christmas when, for all our friends, Christmas was long past, the toys often broken, and most of the joy dispelled. Our long Christmas was a way of making up to us the poverty in which we lived the rest of the year.

One thing I remember from those Christmases was my grandmother and grandfather sitting in their little living room, with an old kerosene heater warming the room, and smelling turkey or goose (if there was money for it) cooking, and hearing my Granddad tell us the Christmas story. At the end of it was always the question from my grandmother: "Whose birth is it?" and three young voices would pipe up "Jesus!" and she would say, "No, yours!" "Every Christmas gives us a chance to be born again, to begin anew, to make things right with God." She was a Baptist at heart and she would tell us, "Jesus is born -- and born again every year, but you are born again every day and every year, and you have the opportunity to live anew."

The essence of Christmas for me is hope. Hope was born that Christmas long ago.

I once preached a sermon about the real figures of Christmas, and I won't do it again, but I would like to center on the shepherds. Shepherds are a dirty lot, especially in an area where there is very little water. They are ritually unclean







Isaiah 62:6-12

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have stationed sentinels: Never, by day or by night, shall they be silent. O you who are to remind our God, take no rest --'and give God no rest until Jerusalem is re-established and made the pride of the earth.

God has sworn by God's right hand and mighty arm: No more will I give your grain as food to your enemies, nor shall they drink the wine for which you toiled. But you who harvested the grain shall eat it and praise our God, and you who gather the grapes shall drink the wine in the courts of my sanctuary.

Pass through, pass through the gates; prepare the way for the people; Build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, raise up a standard over the nations. See, God proclaims to the ends of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, your savior comes with reward and recompense. You shall be called the holy people, the redeemed to God, and you shall be called "Frequented," a city that is not forsaken.

Titus 3:4-7

But when the kindness of love of God our savior appeared, we were saved; not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of God's mercy. We were saved through the baptism of new birth and renewal of the Holy Spirit. This spirit was lavished on us through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs, in hope, of eternal life.

Luke 2:8-20

There were shepherds in that region, living in the fields and keeping night watch over their flocks by turns. The angel of God appeared to them as the glory of God shone around them, and they were very much afraid. The angel said to them: "You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you -- tidings of great joy to be shared by the whole people. This day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and ruler. Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes. Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom God's favor rests." When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said one to another: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing which has been made known to us. They went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger; once they saw, they understood what had been told them concerning this child. All who heard of it were astonished at the report given them by the shepherds. Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, in accord with what had been told them.





### The Bird's The Word

Dorothy Sayers tells the story of the Japanese Buddhist Scholar and the Christian Missionary. The missionary was trying to explain the concept of the Trinity -- one God in Three Persons. The conversation went on for a long time, until finally the Buddhist threw up his hands in frustration. "Honorable Father," he said, "I understand. Honorable Son, I understand. Honorable Bird, I do not understand at all!"

I suspect that for many of us Honorable Bird is difficult to understand. We are comfortable or familiar with many of the Biblical images for aspects of God, because they are human images. We can feel as though God is a lot like us; or, that we are a lot like God. Those aspects of God which we experience as those of a loving mother or father can be a source of comfort and strength. Those aspects of God which we recognize in Jesus as the divine united with our human flesh can be a source of help and encouragement. The God who is experienced as father, mother, brother -- even ruler or sovereign -- is human, in a rather cosy sort of way...one of the family, so to speak.

But the Biblical images for other aspects of God are something else again. They suggest a God who is other, non-human, even a bit dangerous. How after all do we relate to God the Bird? God the Wind? God the Fire? God the Ghost? (I don't know about you, but as a child I was a little worried about "God the Holy Ghost". We say "Holy Spirit" now to try to avoid the problem, but the memory does linger. And "Spirit" isn't much better, really. They both have that insubstantial, haunting quality about them.)

To experience God in ways that are expressed in images like these, is to experience the aspects of God which are wild, free, uncontrollable. They connote tremendous power, and the unpredictable. And the mystery of the Holy Spirit goes beyond even bird, wind, fire and ghost.

Take the gifts of the Spirit, for example: the utterance of wisdom; the utterance of knowledge; faith; healing; working of miracles; prophecy; ability to distinguish between spirits; tongues; the interpretation of tongues. Not a list of abilities that one would put on a resume, is it? Because they all rate very high on intuition, lack of rigid control, subjectivity, community building, openness, and spiritual development. They are not the kind of things one goes to school for.

Or take the fruits of the spirit: love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; self-control. They are all such "affect" qualities; they are such ideals, things longed for yet seldom realized. They seem to have so little practicality in our world of hard edges and realism.

Then there is the fact that the Holy Spirit is the aspect of Godhead against which to sin is unforgivable. Apparently we can sin against God the source, and God-in-humanity, and that can be remedied. But the sin against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. The fact that nobody seems to know just what the sin against the Holy Spirit is just adds to the confusion, because it could be anything. The Holy Spirit on this point, by the way, is uncharacteristically silent. The Spirit knows, but it isn't telling -- which is probably a good thing.

We ourselves further clutter the issue, by dividing people into those who "have the Holy Spirit" and those who don't -- or, those who suffer deprivation and those who suffer delusions, depending on your point of view as to how easy it is to have this particular Bird by the tail.



When we reflect on and experience God the Holy Spirit, that is to say, those aspects of God which we gather under that title, we necessarily reflect on and experience those elements of creation which all too often we exclude or ignore. Our world view is so anthropomorphic, and rational. Our religion is so anthropomorphic, and rational.

God as Bird, Wind, and Fire asks us to go outside our human limits to consider the claims of other entities to image forth aspects of God and to be worthy of respect: the environment, the animal world, the elements. We are not after all entirely like God, nor is God entirely like us.

God as intrinsic power, affect, emotion, and sensation asks us to recognize the worth and validity of this side of experience. God is more than intellectual abstraction, rationality, or objectivity.

God as gift and fruit suggest that our control and understanding are effective only to a point -- God is not tame. God is not in a cage. God has a personal will and a personal mind, and makes decisions and distributions according to divine, not human, purpose. God the Bird, God the Wind, God the Fire. With specific gifts and specific results. With an intrinsic demand for respect which takes us beyond our narrow human limits into interaction and interdependence with all creation.

Part of the awe and frustration when we try to come to grips with what the Holy Spirit is and does is that the scope of the enquiry is as unlimited and mysterious as the Holy Spirit itself.

Jesus narrows it down to some essentials. He tell his disciples that is is to their advantage that he go away, so that another will come. It is apparently very important that the disciples have the presence and work of this aspect of the Godhead with them. So important that it will be better for them than the presence of Jesus. Jesus calls it the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, and says that it will bear witness to Jesus, and will convince the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgement. So the disciples are somewhat prepared in a general way for the arrival of someone or something new. Our scripture from Acts describes what happens when this entity arrives. There are three very practical ways in which the Spirit makes its presence known:

First, there is power and enthusiasm...the images are of the sudden and the unexpected: sound, and the rushing of a mighty wind, and flames of fire resting on each one of them. The disciples are filled with this power, and with enthusiasm. In fact, they are so filled with something other than themselves, and so exuberant, that the bystanders think they are drunk! They are so filled with power that they are able to make a great mental and physical jump, in this case to languages other than their own.

Second, there is preaching. The power and the enthusiasm are harnessed to one end: the telling of the mighty works of God so that all can hear, and so that all can understand. The disciples change from a little group huddled in a room. They become prophets, preachers, spokespersons for God, out on the street, and they tell their visions to all who will listen, without embarrassment or fear. No longer is the telling of the good news reserved for the new, for the special group, for the prophets, priests, or rulers. The proclamation of the goodness of God is given to all.

Third, there is community...the Spirit comes when the disciples are gathered together. The day of Pentecost is unlike that day at the Tower of Babel. There, people and communications were separated. But on the day of Pentecost all people of the world are brought together, and communication between them is restored.

The aspect of Godhead who is Spirit is not localized or limited. Instead, as Counselor and Spirit of Truth it can be with each one of us and with all of us. It breaks down barriers and restraints we erect between ourselves and others. It unites all people in the realization of God's presence and action with them. It unites all people in the reality of their presence and action with one another and with all creation.

The Bird is indeed the Word for our time. For God creates us, and Jesus redeems us in our humanity by death and resurrection, but the spirit is the creativity and the presence of God with us now. A little unfamiliar. More than a little unpredictable. But when we experience power, when we preach the mighty works of God, when we experience community, then as we are gathered together we can be sure that it is the Holy Spirit who is present and active with us. And we can give thanks as the servants of God upon whom this Spirit is poured out in love and blessing.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Victoria Jane Gaskell  
Old West Church  
Boston





## UNDERSTANDING OUR WORSHIP SERVICE

Goodmorning, friends! We are here to worship the Lord in wisdom and ~~and~~ in truth--and wisdom implies understanding. So let us gain some understanding of how the worship service is conducted, and why it is conducted this way.

As the one who conducts the service I fulfill two roles: The priestly role--representing you before God. Opening the Word corresponds to Moses entering through the curtain into the holy of holies. But at the crucifixion of our Lord that curtain was torn from top to bottom--and so there is no curtain to separate you from God. Nothing stands between you and the holy Word. Thus the opening of the Word is to bring the whole congregation into relationship--face to face--with God.

The second role I fill is that of God's prophet--bringing to you God's holy Word--both truth and love, and both together, with the scripture readings being truth coming forth from love, and this sermon being love, coming forth from truth.

The ideal vestment that I could wear would have the front part--that which you would see as I face you--made of burlap--as the prophets wore, for it was they who spoke to the people as the Lord's representative. And the back part of the vestment would be made of linen, so that as I faced away from you, and were representing you before the Lord, which is the priestly function, then it is the linen side of the vestment you would see, for at one point when the Lord got very angry with the way the sons of Aaron were handling the sacrifices, He ordered that only the sons of Zadoc could perform this service, and that they were to wear only linen.

The service itself is based on Isaiah 6:1-8. We see that it is a vision in which Isaiah sees the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. And so our copy of the Word--representing the Lord--is high and lifted up above you as you sit in the pews. And the alter is its throne.

One seraph calls to another "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." And so we open our service with the singing of a song of praise and later sing the Sanctus: "Holy, holy, holy; Lord God of hosts; Heaven and earth are full of thy glory." You see the connection!

The next thing that happens in this vision is that Isaiah is shaking in his boots and saying "woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

That statement is something that most of us can relate to, isn't it? Perhaps as recently as driving here to church this morning something came up--like a discourteous driver--to cause us to grumble a few unclean words. And we know we dwell among a people of unclean lips. And would we not shake in our boots--like Isaiah--if the Lord should suddenly appear before us--on a throne--high and lifted up. Well, here He is! We know He is present with us all the time--omni-present and all-knowing. And so we should all quake a bit when we enter into this worship, and really mean it when we say "have mercy upon me, O God,...blot out my transgressions. Wash me...and cleanse me... For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."

John. Coyle -  
523 0043









# 1. Story of the 3 Pigs

4. Straw - few scraps of scripture - Proof texting  
condemnation - No ours to follow suit
5. Twigs of Tradition - Traditions we love &  
the traditions we hate. Too much emphasis  
on reaction rather than action.
6. Bricks - Solid building blocks of x'tian  
doctrine. Knowing what we believe  
& why.
  1. Does it meet tests of being able to  
be trusted - is it sound doctrine
  2. Is it justice-oriented?
  3. Does it promote righteousness

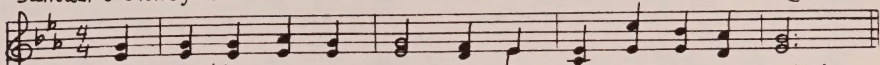
## Building a church -

1. Chosen people - chosen because of our  
love of God & humanity
2. Royal priesthood - priesthood of believers
3. Holy nations - called to holy living -  
~~non-attacking~~ responsible
4. People belonging to god - Bought &  
responding to that purchase. Ethical  
because we were once sojourners in  
Egypt.
5. We who were once "no people" are now  
people of God - On this build your church.

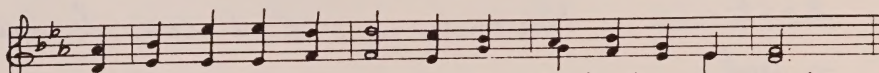
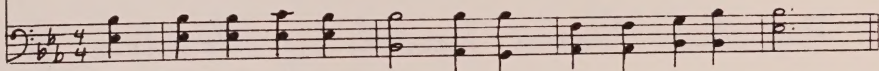
## The Church's One Foundation

Ephesians 1-4  
Samuel J. Stone, 1866

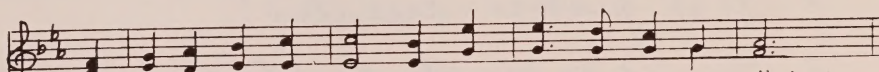
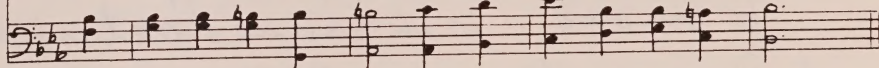
AURELIA 7.6.7.6.D.  
Samuel S. Wesley, 1864



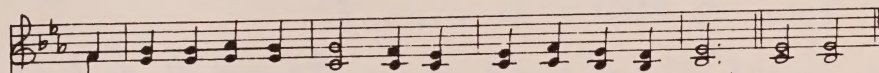
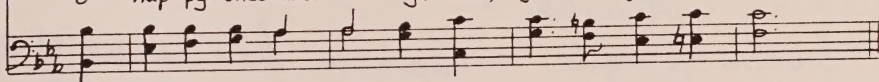
1. The church's one foun-da-tion Is Christ, God's own true child,
2. E-lect from ev-ery na-tion, Yet one o'er all the earth,
3. 'Mid toil and trib-u-la-tion, And tu-mult of earth's war,
4. Yet we on earth have un-ion With God, the Three in One,



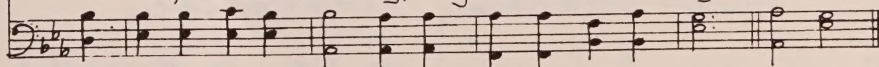
In whom the whole cre-a-tion Is freed and rec-on-ciled.  
Our char-ter of sal-va-tion, One God, one faith, one birth,  
We seek the con-sum-ma-tion Of peace for ev-er-more;  
And mys-tic sweet com-mun-ion With those whose rest is won.



To bring the church to-geth-er, Christ lived and free-ly died;  
One name we would be bless-ing, One ho-ly food we share,  
Till with the vi-sion glo-rious, Our long-ing eyes are blest,  
O hap-py ones and ho-ly! God, give us grace that we



Raised up by God, for-ev-er Christ lives to be our guide.  
To one hope we are press-ing, At one in work and prayer.  
And the great church vic-to-rious Shall be the church at rest.  
Like them, the meek and low-ly, May live e-ter-nal-ly. A-men.



Words adapted by Ruth Duck, ©1981. (Adaptation based on Ephesians 1-4.)







In California we had a church member & a <sup>water outdoor Italian tile</sup> pool, who used to let us borrow it for baptisms & last Easter morning we took six of our church members there; <sup>and</sup> with a cold rain falling, waded into the warmed water, pronounced the age-old formula & then wrapped them in warm towels and fed them hot milk & honey, <sup>as symbols that they were "baptized" in</sup> the ancient church used to do. It <sup>church</sup> would not have been difficult to imagine a dove settling on the rafters over the doorway to the beach house. Jesus' baptism was a fitting beginning to ministry, but I'm not really concerned in <sup>the</sup> baptism scripture tonight as much as I am the "servant" scripture.

I guess the whole world has had a lot of problems about what to do with Jesus — <sup>beginning with Pilate</sup> and these days can't be any different. Some doubt that he was a truly historical figure — and I have no new evidence to offer for his existence. Outside of Christian scripture, the <sup>possible sequence of</sup> only references I know of from his own historical period was one sentence in Josephus



This is the season we call Epiphany - and the <sup>greek</sup> word has the same significance as the Hebrew Emmanuel - God with us.

Someone once said that the best way of understanding the story of Jesus is to say that after all those years of God speaking through the prophets & nobody much listening, the Creator's head shook in heavenly exasperation & God said, "Look, I'll show you what I mean!"

Our scripture today tells of Jesus' baptism & I'm an old re-treaded Baptist - so wading out into the water is a wonderful symbol for me. I was baptized in New Orleans at age 35 - by choice - and the night I was baptized a woman who was deaf & blind was also baptized with the deaf pastor signing in her hands the questions & the liturgical formulas: "We are buried in Christ by baptism unto death & raised to walk in newness of life." And none of us were moved & I have never forgotten that night.



now - for 2,000 years later, the person is still so controversial that religious & political figures are still arguing about him, some people are waging wars or refusing to wage them in his name, <sup>new</sup> religious groups are springing up in totally unlikely places - like ours - with some relation to the person. A few people somewhere weekly wade into the water in obedience to his example - and <sup>whole</sup> societies still have the ability to be upset or stabilized by his message.

For us, the example of servanthood is still a good one -

But this sermon is not a conclusion, it's the beginning of an explanation. If you will it's a little like the <sup>story of</sup> the <sup>evangelical</sup> board member <sup>and</sup> <sup>west</sup> ~~who~~ who went up to a ministerial candidate & asked ~~her~~ <sup>him</sup> "Do you preach the whole gospel?" "Not every Sunday!" was her reply. This is not the whole story but ~~the beginning~~ <sup>one that</sup> ends "To be continued..." Amen.





in Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective was talking about the servant symbolism used of Jesus - and she said:

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MCC is a broad-spectrum church. We had a lot of beliefs about Jesus - everything from a "Jesus only" (what some theologians call "Third person Unitarian") to a <sup>positive</sup> total irrelevance - but there is some relevance to Jesus life + teachings & for me the idea that God tried to show us what human life could be like is most important. Jesus did not maintain the male model of his day. He did not lay power trips, nor accept them. He didn't lead armies or wage wars. He just moved about the country side & talked to people. But that was finally seen as so dangerous that someone had to do something about it. The ideas were dangerous then & they are dangerous now & it doesn't matter who said them at the moment. The effect mattered then & it matters



Jewish laws about the execution of  
a certain "Chrestus" which upset his  
followers. Yet I believe <sup>that belief has</sup> changed my life.

I've heard angry feminists say,  
"I don't need to be saved by a male  
savior." And that's probably the  
truest statement I've ever heard  
from anyone. I don't particularly  
want Jesus' maleness to be a  
factor in my own personal faith either  
— which is not to disparage those of  
that gender — I don't think you had  
much choice about the whole subject  
and I don't figure Jesus did either,  
but if you ask me some time I'll  
tell you a joke that proves — logically —  
that Jesus had to be female — which  
is about as much faith as I have  
in logic as a base for my spiritual  
life.

About the most helpful thing I've  
heard anyone say about Jesus  
was something Letty Russell said —  
She's a Theologian & the wife of a  
Theologian — and has written many,  
many books on both feminist &  
traditional theology — But Letty Russell

It is particularly true that MCC presents a message of acceptance - all are invited to the altar. "Ministering in X's name, we invite you to this table where all are welcome." MCC communion is an open communion, with no exclusions, "that grace may everywhere abound."

While certain MCC clergy might voice objections, the longer one is with MCC as clergy, the closer one moves to a point of universal salvation.

At this point, having



discussed some of what  
UCC's Statement of Faith  
contains & the accepted  
interpretation of same,  
let us turn to the roots  
of some of these beliefs.  
The Radical Reformation





## Pearl of Great Price

"The dominion of God is like one who found a pearl of great price & went & sold all and purchased it."

When I preached the budget sermon I dealt with the idea of sacrifice - of finding something worth enough for a person to sacrifice anything, everything for. It seems to me that these days we're just a little embarrassed to admit that there is anything we feel strongly enough about to want to sacrifice or give our everything to. So I want to look at the Pearl of Great Price as a point of reference. What is it that we - as a church - stand for that would make one sell everything else for that one thing. Why would anyone want to belong to an MCC - especially this one?

Well, let me "witness" as we used to say down in the old So. Baptist church I came out of.

The first time I came to an MCC, it was 63 men & me - and I ran like a bandit because there was no way





I was going to be comfortable in that setting. I had just returned from N.O. after 12 years and in my first week home (it was late June!) I discovered gay liberation + women's liberation - I think on the same day. The feminist in me could not imagine being surrounded - even in church - by 63 men. About 2 months later I went back. There was 1 other woman - a lesbian RC nun! But we talked and she made the point that if it was going to change women were going to have to make the change, primarily by hanging in & drawing other women to the church. I wasn't willing at that point in my life - it wasn't a pearl of great price and I couldn't find that much value in it for me. But I went back. The next time I went back, Nancy Wilson was preaching & had done some strange things with the service. To prove a point, she had turned all the scripture around to reflect only women's names, women's God as a woman, humanity as women, & Jesus as a woman. I freaked (as a good So. Baptist would) but I also





caught sight of a dream, and the dream caught me. I had discovered what we then called "desexing" the language — & what we're now wise enough to call "Inclusive Language". I began what has been an 8 year pilgrimage which does not end — a pilgrimage to recover the female images for God in scripture and to recover the dignity of women in the Christian church. I had found my pearl of great price — a reason to sell all — which, as many of you know, included even the question of my being licensed or ordained in MCC. At one point we were laughing (through our tears) and Karen Ziegler, pastor at V.U. and Shelly Hamilton, pastor at Brooklyn were talking about being called "heretic" — which is a very painful place if you are a committed Christian — and they are or they wouldn't be ~~here~~ in MCC at all — for there are other alternatives — at any rate, Karen said something about getting T-shirts that said "heretic #1" + "heretic #2" — and we agreed that mine ought to say "Heretic Emeritus" in honor of my age + precedence in the fight! I once — in California, at the Mother Church — had occasion





to perform a HU for two feminists - both  
more into women's spirituality than  
Christianity - but who (in that corner of our  
hearts where God keeps reaching for us  
even when we have turned away) wanted  
their relationship made sacred in the  
sight of God - came to me at UCC for  
that service. They wanted to use the  
Chapel at the Potter Church - and there was  
a huge, ugly, unbelievably male painting  
(a male preta - if you will) with lots of  
semi-naked Roman soldiers ~~the~~ <sup>with</sup>  
big bulging muscles - probably painted  
lavishly by one of our brothers! Anyway,  
the women balked at having their HU  
in front of this painting and we very  
carefully removed it from the chapel.  
A week later it was all over the  
church that I had committed the  
heresy of removing "their Jesus" from the  
Chapel. There are some heresies  
I would die for. Anyway, as time  
went on, I discovered for me the  
pearl of great price - for which I  
would gladly sell all.

But - strangely - my pearl came  
with a second pearl - because I





was not only a feminist - but a lesbian feminist - I got a <sup>red</sup> twelve pearl, because I discovered a God who cared personally about me as I really am and I did not have to even consider being other than what I am - or hide, or try to justify myself before God - I was already justified through no act of mine - a loving God had already cared enough about me to provide a sacrifice I didn't have to make, a pearl of great price that I didn't have to sell anything for - a pearl I merely had to accept as mine, my free gift from God.

The gay person - the feminist - the whole person in me was given greater wholeness, greater validation here than anywhere else.

Let me share a part of my pearl of great price with you, then, now that you know where & how I found it - Scripture says:





Loneliness: Beyond loneliness: Shoglen  
How to Win Over Loneliness, John Haggai

What is loneliness?

Alone is not loneliness.

78% feel loneliness sometimes. 15% feel lonely most of time 6% never feel lonely.

Loneliness: Search for Intimacy. (Not for adults only.)

Tots: (Trust) loved, cuddled, comforted.

Children 6-10: (Changes) "Homesickness", visceral, nobody understands. Rejected, inferior, different. "Am I always going to be like this?" ? of coping.

Teens: Identity crises, not belonging, self-image.

Young Adults: Most vulnerable. Issue of intimacy, forming meaningful relationships, adjustment, leaving security, value conflicts.

Middle Adults: Subtle loneliness, mid-life crises, marital problems, divorce, health, jobs, economics. (Change).



Elderly: (have most difficulty talking about it.)  
Can't talk about feelings, but would like to.  
Doesn't have words to express feelings.  
Increased disability, loss of spouse, home, etc.  
Loss of family structure.

[No mention of loss of relationships]

Entrepreneurs <sup>exploiters</sup> ready to make money from it.

Singles complexes

Computer/dating services

Singles bars

"Instant community"/"instant intimacy"

Guru - instant peace

encounter groups

sensitivity groups

? Touch - people need touch.

EST - Ehrhard Sensitivity Training

(Promises instant self-respect)

Religion - Cults that prey on people's needs.

Jonestown - need to belong

Instant community

Belonging.

Causes: Shy <sup>not</sup> outgoing, introverted, "no one knows me"  
"What have I to give".  
low self-esteem



Healing = emotions, depression, attitude



the world, which God loves, & in Christ dies for. The ~~minister's~~<sup>clergy's</sup> task is not to minister to the congregation in such a way that members are insulated from the pain of the world or blind to their responsibility to share in God's mission in the world. That would be a faithless Shepherd looking for praise, but under God's judgment.

Church as Infirmary (Disagree but understand)  
"Spiritual cripples" refuge, where people long for spiritual uplift & desperately search for peace of mind - but find their insatiable desires never satisfied. But we are not consumers of spiritual medicaments, but disciples of Christ. When we relinquish rewards, we are given what we long for & more. "Fear not, little flock, your parent in heaven wants to give you the Kingdom."

Church as Armory (Disagree but understand)  
Brings together the church to equip them for God's mission (a battle?) in the world. The congregation are consumers but not as an end in itself, but for the sake of being able to undertake God's mission in the world - which may mean pain & suffering - the burden of the cross we bear voluntarily - that we may be



the world, which has been, & is Christ's for  
the world's sake in order to minister to the  
congregation in such a way that members are  
inspired from the power of the word in which  
to their responsibility to share in God's mission  
in the world. The answer is a faithful shepherd  
looking for grace, but under God's judgment.

Church as Refinement (Thompson has understood)  
"spiritual supply" - refuge, where people look  
for spiritual life & refreshment, places for  
rest of mind - but find this in the  
divine power, not in the world. But we are not  
conscious of spiritual refreshment, but  
principles of divine. When we recognize  
ourselves, we are given, when we look for  
more. "I am not better than you, you are  
in the same way to give you the kingdom."

Church as Ministry (Thompson has understood)  
Bringing together the church to equip  
them for God's mission (a battle?) in the  
world. The congregation are encouraged  
but that is not in itself, but for the  
sake of being able to understand God's  
mission in the world - which they were  
given & fulfilling - the function of the church  
has been established - that we may be

renewed for the task. It includes an infirmary for wounded members, but guards against spiritual malingering!

Churches become fundamentalist not only biblically, but on form. Change means risk + the courage to bear risk is only possible when faith is real. Vitality of worship is a central concern to any consideration of change within the local church.

Our security is in God alone. Worship expresses + points to that security which is grounded in acceptance of the unconditional love of God. Ours is the response to the free gift of love, which overcomes anxiety + heals our transgressions, + enables us to respond to our mission in the world.

The process of change in the local congregation is rooted in the confrontation with situations that demand decisions.

The cost of decision-making is real, and accentuates differences of opinion + stimulates controversy. It includes risk on the part of clergy - particularly



Personnel. In the last. It includes an  
information for personnel members, but gives  
official spiritual background!

Churches become fundamentalists and are  
doubtful, but on form. Change means  
risk & the courage to have faith is very  
possible when faith is real. Ministry of  
leading is a central concern to any church.  
Time of change within the local church.

Our ministry is in God alone. Leadership  
expresses & points to that reality which  
is grounded in acceptance of the gospel.  
distinct form of God. Because the response  
to the free gift of love, which overcomes  
guilt & leads out of darkness, &  
enables us to respond to our mission  
in the world.

The process of change in the local  
congregation is based in the transformation  
with intention the human decision.

The cost of decision - making is real,  
and accounts for differences of opinion  
& attitudes. Contrary. It includes  
risk on the part of clergy. Pastors

in those traditions where the clergy remains  
as leader only at the pleasure of the congregation.  
Clergy's efforts to lead a congregation into  
God's mission is certain to involve displeasure  
on some parts. When the displeasure is  
too widespread, there is a parting of the ways —  
with either clergy leaving or congregants  
leaving. This happens far too often for  
comfort.

Yet the Christian message is not always one  
of comfort. "Do not think I have come  
to bring peace on earth; I have not  
come to bring peace but a sword..."  
Matt 10: 34 ff. The effort to ~~bring~~ <sup>discover</sup> God's mission for a church brings  
not peace but conflict & sets one  
member of a family against another.

Can a local church have controversy  
& not disband? Can members disagree  
on matters of vital importance & still  
find oneness in X? Can positions be taken  
on moral & ethical issues without  
becoming "holier-than-thou?"

No church wants controversy, yet conflict  
must be accepted as inevitable in



in their position. When the clergy remain  
apathetic only at the pleasure of the congregation.  
Clergy's efforts to lead a congregation into  
God's service is certain to involve discipline  
and compromise. When the discipline is  
too weak, there is a falling of the ways -  
with either clergy leaving or congregation  
leaving. This happens far too often for  
comfort.

For the Union Message to the clergy can  
be comfort. "Do not think I have come  
to bring peace on earth; I have not  
come to bring peace but a sword."  
Matt 10:34. The effort to bring  
the Gospel to the world for a church brings  
the peace but conflict & war on  
members of a family against another.

Can a loose church have controversy  
& get rich? Can members disagree  
on matters of vital importance? Will  
find members in X? Can position be taken  
on moral & ethical issues without  
becoming "bitter-sour-then?"

The church must controversy, yet conflict  
must be accepted as inevitable in

any church that exposes itself to the world in the name of X and seeks to respond to the needs it encounters.

### Sources of Conflict

External: The world resists the church's intervention in its domain + counters this with power + resources. It can be ridiculed + condemned as it engages the areas of civil rights, peace, poverty + so on.

Internal: Controversy in the church — controversies due to resistance to change and/or the selection of means to achieve changes agreed upon. Deep-rooted antipathy to change, esp. in those older or of a more rigid personality type.

Many are nostalgic for the church as it used to be — "worshipping at the church back home", idealizing the past, the rural, the homey. Others are future-oriented + centered on "what could be if..."

Controversy is not necessarily bad — crises present dynamic opportunities for growth — but they are always dangerous to stability + cohesion in a



any chance that express itself to the world  
in the name of a right which is supposed to be  
in existence.

### Source of Conflict

Butcher: The world's history is the history of  
intervention in its domain & countries this  
intervention & progress. It can be divided  
into four periods. In its history, the world  
is divided into four periods, present & so on.

Butcher: Butcher's view of the world is  
that the world is a great power to change  
and for the selection of persons to change  
change, agreed upon. The world is  
subjected to change. The world is  
as of a more rigid form, the world is

There are statistics for the world as it  
used to be - "managing" as the world  
had been, extending the force, the  
world, the history. Other one future -  
present & future, what comes in if...

Butcher is now necessary, but -  
China's present dynamic opportunities  
for growth. - But the world is always  
power & history & culture in a

group - if we can stand it.

Change must be planned for to minimize conflict, sufficient information & time given to preparation & education, alternatives must be provided.

But what if conflict is unavoidable ultimately?

### Personal Goals

1. Goals that have nothing to do with org. These goals, however, affect their behavior in the org.
2. Goals for the org.
3. The org's goals.

Conflict grows out of 3 vs 1, 2's, 2 vs 3.

### Managing Conflict

Pastor's task.

#### Goals

1. Help others feel better about selves.
2. Persons & orgs manage conflict best when all are feeling good about themselves.
3. Strive for better communication  
Effective commun. consists of in-depth



group - if we can show it.

Group must be planned for to minimize conflict, sufficient information & time given to preparation & education, alternative must be provided.

But what if conflict is unavoidable?  
Minimizing?

Planned Goals

1. Goals of have nothing to do w/ org. these goals, however, affect their behavior in the org.
2. Goals for the org.
3. The org. goals.

Conflict grows out of 3rd, 2nd, 1st.

Managing Conflict  
Foster's book.

Goals

1. Help them feel better abt. release.
2. Release w/ org. manage conflict base when we are feeling good abt. them.

2. Time for better communication  
Effective communication. Current thought

and reflective listening (Rogerian feed-back good here), + pending with the knowledge that one's own perceptions + messages are uniquely one's own.

3. Examine + filter assumptions  
Unexamined assumptions lead to destructive conflict.
4. Identify goals - what is wanted.  
Identify what a <sup>person</sup> group, or org. is trying to accomplish, what is wanted, in a situation is an essential element in conflict management.
5. Identify primary issues  
Until the primary issue has been identified by the principal parties in the conflict, it is difficult to manage the conflict.
6. Develop Alternatives for Goal achievement  
Search for alternatives that will allow all parties to achieve that which is important + fulfilling for them.
7. Institutionalize Conflict Mgt. Processes



5. Psychological Conflicts Hyp. Processes

6. Learning & Reinforcement for Good Behaviors  
Process of extinction that mice avoid  
all parties to achieve the subject to  
conflict & the feeling for them.

2. Identified primary causes  
but the primary cause has been  
identified by the framing of parties  
in the conflict, it is difficult to  
manage the conflict.

4. Identified goals. What is wanted.  
Identified what is <sup>being</sup> done, as well as trying  
to accomplish, what is wanted, in a  
situation is an essential element in  
conflict management.

5. Examine & filter assumptions  
Unexamined assumptions lead to  
destructive conflict.

and reflecting patterns (Rogersian free-form  
and form), & dealing with the knowledge  
that one's own perceptions & messages  
are uniquely one's own.



To be effective, Conf. mgt. processes must be institutionalized + not created solely for special occasions.

p. 71-72

Liturgy: Thanksgiving  
Confession  
Absolution  
Intercession  
Service

## Styles of Managing Conflict

p. 80

win/lose

win even at risk of damaging group.  
aggressive, dogmatic, inflexible,  
unreasonable approach. Goal: over-  
come the adversary at any cost.

## Accommodation

Preserve the relationship at any cost, even to giving up personal goals. Relationships are seen as fragile + person will give up pressing own goals ~~in order~~ + not endure working through differences.

## Avoidance

Not possible to accomplish goals in conflict. Withdraw, avoid, get away. Solve the conflict psychologically.

to be effective, Conf. mgt. processes  
must be established & not created  
only for special occasions

9-11-94  
Workshop: Managing  
Conflicts  
Resolution  
Processes  
Review

Workshop Managing Conflicts  
Workshop

9-80  
This is an act of managing group.  
aggressive, aggressive, inflexible,  
unreasonable approach. Goal: own  
control the situation or not, cost.

Coordination

Review the relationship as an  
act, even to giving up personal  
goals. Relationships are seen as  
fragile & for one will give up  
personal goals & not  
continue working through differences.

Coordination

Not possible to accomplish goals  
in conflict. Work hard, avoid, get  
away. There are other methods, call



p.

even when cannot do it physically.  
(Compromise).

Win/Win

high concern for maintaining the relationship & high regard for personal goals.

~~The style~~ All styles are used by people depending on circumstances, issues, & intentions. Some people invariably use one style first in conflict & then others in descending order. Some styles are healthier & produce greater health used on a regular basis. To be most effective, one would begin & win/win, compromise, accommodation, win/lose, & finally avoidance.

Know your own style

Stages in change

1. Assessment (where am I now)
2. Value Assertion (what do I want)
3. Concepts, theories, & understanding (How do I get there?)
4. Personal Experiencing (what actions must I take?)



new urban centers as is physically.  
(Comprehensive).

Urban/Urban

high concern for maintaining the  
relationship to high regard for personal  
goals.

the high the style are used by people. When -  
high or environmental, business, & industrial.  
Some people naturally use one style.  
first in conflict & then others in the -  
including order. Some styles are best in  
& produce greater results than others.  
Regular basis. To be most effective,  
one must begin with Urban/Urban, Comprehensive,  
coordination, Urban/Urban, & finally  
avoidance.

Urban Urban Urban style

Steps in change

1. Awareness (Urban Urban Urban)
2. Value Awareness (Urban Urban Urban)
3. Concepts, theories, & understanding (Urban Urban Urban)
4. Personal Experience (Urban Urban Urban)

5. External Evaluation (How do others respond to my action?)

6. Reflective Recycling (Did it satisfy me?)





pp. 78 -

Leas <sup>to</sup> <sup>fligere</sup> strike, "strike together" → c. Douglas Lewis  
Conflict - when (2 pieces of matter) try to occupy same space at same time. I.e. persons, groups, orgs.

Ross Stagner: A situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one or the other but not by both.

Management: "The process of seeking to accomplish objectives through the utilization of human material resources."  
Trends:  
Intra personal - Charact: withdrawal, rationalization, denial of conflict's existence, fight belief.  
inter personal  
Substantive

Intra:

Feeling, warring & in indir. Puritan conscience vs. playful side; rational calculating self vs. love for the non-rational aesthetic. Ben deals with counseling, ~~confrontation~~ therapy, study, methods directed at indiv. change.

Inter

Incompatibility as persons. Not what person thinks about issue but how one feels about another person. (Oed, black, hairy, fast don't like.) Counseling, therapy, confrontation, encounter groups, peer-training, education.

Substantive:

One facts, means, ends, values. How to spend much money. Often factions develop.

1. Contract

2. Clarification

Track down:

1. How you there?
2. Who or what caused it + when started?
3. Why did it? purpose, accident?

3. Differentiating issues

4. Clarify what each party wants

5. Estab. a process

6. -listening

-collaborating (x2)

Double Column

Rogrian Repetition

Stop the Music

Catharsis



## Functions of Conflict

Empowerment: Energizes + gives life to group. When amt. of threat, tension + anxiety in org is low, "no sense of urgency, no nec. to look for alt. ways of behaving, + no incentive for conciliatory overtures."

When level of threat is higher "the person searches for + integrates more information, considers more alternatives, + experiences a higher sense of urgency in changing the situation." Healthy compet. state, prod. efficiency + brings new life. Programs + plans are challenged etc.

Very high level of threat, more than system can bear. Rigidity of positions + polarization of adversaries. "Our side" vs "their side".

"Which way is my team going?"

Immobilizes + tends to produce shock + in org. rather than energizing + challenging to fulfill mission. Church = history of healthy conflict <sup>take</sup> extreme threat to weaken. But church to where conflict suppressed + avoided, feels failure if goals + procedures questioned.



Function of conflict

Development: In groups & gives life to group.  
When out of balance, tension & anxiety in group is  
lost. As phase of progress, we need to have  
for all group of behaving, & no incentive for  
individual behavior.

When level of threat is higher, the person  
needs for & integrates more information.  
Consider more alternatives & experiences  
a higher level of responsibility. Changing the  
situation. Making group, state, group.  
Efficiency & being more like. Progress &  
plans are challenges etc.

Very high level of threat, more than system  
can bear. Rigidity of position & polarization  
of resources. "Yes, Sir" or "No, Sir".

Which way is my team going?  
Organizational & team to produce what &  
in org. rather than energized & challenging  
to fulfill mission. Check & control of  
last conflict before threat to mission.  
That chance to where conflict expressed &  
resolved, but future if past procedures  
questioned.

Establishes Identity: Esp. conflict  $\bar{c}$  "outsiders". "He who is not  $\bar{c}$  me is against me." (Matt 12:30) Ingroup vs. Outgroup.

For some min. groups, this has meant negotiation from strength + pos. identity rather than weakness + uncertainty.

Unifies the Ingroup. Differences intragroup are suppressed + it becomes more effective as task group. Ingroup tends to permit traditional leadership pattern dominate rather than risk "In house" struggle + letting group really battle out who would be best leader at this time. Ingroup tends to overlook own inadequacies + see only inadequacies of opponents. Various factions tend to operate fairly well as teams although whole org. may diminish in effectiveness.

Bearing the Intolerable: Conflict can be a release, a means by which we are able to bring  $\bar{c}$  in the limits of toleration that which would otherwise be <sup>unbearable</sup> ~~intolerable~~. Fight rather than ~~try~~ leave church - women, blacks, anti-war, etc. Make demands for change. or get out.



Patricia's Identity: Gap - conflict &  
"outlet": "He who is not a man is a woman."  
me. (Mott 12:30) Group vs. Outgroup.  
For some, min. groups this has become neg-  
tiation from strength & for identity, not for  
then weakness & uncertainty.

Within the Group: Differences in group  
in appearance & it becomes more effective  
as folk group. Group tries to permit  
traditional leadership within dominant  
rather than risk "the house" struggle &  
little group will battle out who remains in  
and leader at the time. Group tries  
to control over individual & not only  
independence of opponents. Various factors  
lead to greater fight with a team although  
individual may win in effectiveness.

Having the Outlets: Conflict can be a  
process, a process to the one who is to  
bring in the fruits of interaction that will  
prove effective for individual. Fight  
rather than the same thing - women,  
black, out-war, etc. Make changes for  
change or get out.



Too much conflict: Mostly factor of people's fantasy. Church people strong, enjoy challenges. Blind obed. to norm that conflict is wrong, unchristian, & seems fake scurrying. Conflict generally will not hurt group but will make group healthier - but it does upset norm that Christians should not be in conflict. Open conflicters are shunned, avoided, cast out. Debilitating because it gets in way of growth, change & development.

But some situations do lead to violence, dissolution of group, destruction of consensus & control (defeat) of minority by majority (or vice versa). Usually in response to perception of choice as either no conflict or all out war. If history of healthy dealing w/ conflict parties involved will choose behavior other than search & destroy as only way to deal w/ "enemies". In church - there are no enemies.

the three conflict: First, factor of  
people's nature. Human people always  
bring challenges. This leads to more the  
conflict in group, interaction, & power  
for surviving. Conflict generally will not  
just group but will make group less this -  
but it also upon reason that Christians  
should not be in conflict. When conflict  
are planned, avoided, and not  
become a group of power, change &  
development.

the group structure, the lead to conflict,  
disruption of group, destruction of consensus  
& control (chief of minority by majority)  
(or vice versa). However, in response to  
perception of this as either no conflict or  
all out war. If leader of both, dealing  
5 conflict parties involved will choose  
human other than process & destroy as only  
way to deal 5 "enemies". For church - there  
are no enemies.



## Assumptions re Conflict

1. Conflict is possible where relationships are not tenuous. (where relat. are not firm, people don't know each other, min. amt. of trust, little feeling for how others operate, tendency to suppress conflict. Conversely, when people care, there can be conflict.
2. Elimination of personal motives from conflict tends to lead toward sharper conflict. When one is in touch w motives, one will not tend to idealize or dehumanize battle; less likely to carry on a crusade for the true, right + just.  
"Conflicts in which the participants feel they are merely representatives of collectivities or groups, fighting not for self but only for the ideals of the groups they represent, they are more likely to be less merciful & more radical than those fought for personal reasons. Elim. of the personal element tends to make conflict sharper. The absence of modifying elements which personal factors would normally introduce" (p. 44)



3. Discrimination of personal motives from  
 conflict tends to have serious danger.  
 conflict. When one is in force a  
 motive, one will not tend to identify  
 or dehumanizing factor; but likely to carry  
 or a crusade for the true, right & just.  
 "Conflict is at the participants' feet  
 they are social representations of collective  
 a group, fighting not for and not for the  
 ideals of the group, the representative, they  
 are more likely to be identified & more  
 radical than their fight for personal  
 reasons. Some of the personal elements  
 tend to make conflict dangerous. The  
 presence of conflict, and elements of personal  
 action from personal motives" (p. 47)

4. Conflict is possible when relationships  
 are not between. (When relationships  
 are firm, people don't know each  
 other, their own & their, their feeling  
 for how other operate, tendency to  
 suppress conflict. Generally, when  
 people are, there can be conflict.

Discrimination in Conflict

### Lewis Loew

3. Conflict is less sharp in those groups which appeal to the periphery of one's personality. "In groups in which relations are functionally specific + affectively neutral, conflicts are less sharp + violent than in groups wherein ties are diffuse + affective, engaging the total personality of members... (Relig. orgs.) aim at encompassing the total personality, hence the bond between members is much stronger than in groups where segmental types of relations prevail.

4. The larger the # of conflicts, the greater the stability of the group. Where there are few conflicts ~~=~~ esp. where there is only one - org. tends to become more polarized. i.e. every decision tends to be made only in rel. to major conflict. When a # of conflicts are going on simultaneously, group tends to be formed from diff. personnel around diff. issues. (Diff. persons tend to form coalitions around diff. issues. seldom same persons agree on all issues.)



3. Conflict is less sharp in these groups which appear to the surface of one's personality. "An group in which relations are fundamentally antagonistic & oppositional, conflict is less sharp & violence than in groups exhibiting the total personality & affecting, suggesting the total personality of members... (Lewis, 1938) and in overexpressing the total personality, hence the link between members is much stronger than in groups where segments of personality prevail.

4. The larger the # of conflicts the greater the stability of the group. Where there are few conflicts or none, where there is only one - viz. fight to become more polarized. i.e. every decision tends to be made only in relation to major conflict. When a lot of conflicts are going on simultaneously, groups tend to be formed from diff. personality segments diff. issues. (diff. groups tend to form coalition around diff. issues rather than general ones or all issues)



5. The closer the group personally, the greater the threat the conflict poses. Tends to be more threatening because people care more about ea. other & the effect of the other's response will be more deeply felt - same of pain assoc. w conflict will be more deeply felt.
6. Where groups tend to suppress conflict, there will be accumulation of feeling, leading toward a potentially dangerous conflict. Pressure cooker effect. The more pressure, the greater the explosion if the pressure is not abated. When this occurs, it puts church in position of having to mobilize great energy & resources to deal w rising problem. Outsiders may see confl. as petty & small.

### Managing Conflict

Without Referee

Making contract

Agree on process

Agree on decision rule

Agree on goals

Agree on time line

(Contra Parkinson's law.)

(Robert Johnson's Law)  
Agree on your line  
Agree on goals  
Agree on the vision, goals  
Agree on resources  
Working contract  
Mutual respect.

### Managing conflict

Conflict may be useful, as with a process  
of resources to deal with problems. But  
position of leaders to handling great issues  
states. When the status, as just stated in  
greater the expression of the phenomenon is not  
control effort. The more pressure, the  
toward a potentially dangerous conflict. Pressure  
will be accumulation of feeling, leading  
to where groups tend to suppress conflict, then

With the more conflict free  
helpful free - some of your groups - to conflict  
the other's response, more the more  
case more about as others the effect of  
As the more threatening the more people  
greater the threat the conflict more. And  
2. The closer the group processes, the



## Find a Referee

Professional Background.

Assoc. for relig. etc. (appdx 1)

Group Experience

Self-Understanding & Personal Security

Democratic Philosophy.

(Passive Refs.)

## Leadership in Conflict.

Formal leaders: office holders, pastor, chairs.

Informal leaders: Influential persons connected by those in authority. Long time members, previous officeholders, special expertise/experience, large contributors.

Certain advantages:

not in power, not seen as threat (as can be if financial).

## Qual. of Unknown Potential Leaders:

Qual. lay people, deacons, etc. May have advantage of potential trust from all sides - clean slate & no debts & credits. (Less likely in a small group.) Must be someone not committed to any one side.



Ques.

Answer: Not committed to any one

side in a group group. That is

clear that is no side or center. (This

advantage of potential transfer are not -

Ques. for people, because, the

most of American political leaders.

(as can be if financial).

not in form, but seen as there.

breakdown. Within advantages:

special expertise, experience, long

time members, previous appointments,

connected in those in authority. Long

performance leaders: Influential persons

Chair.

former leaders: Office holders, past,

leadership in politics.

(Passion, etc.)

democratic philosophy.

Self-education, personal accounts,

group experience

Excess. for this. etc. (Appendix 1)

Final reference

## Qual. of Referee

1. Doesn't take substantial conflict personally. Referee needs to have enough ego strength to keep the parties from the substantive issue & yet not be overcome by deference, dislike, or disapproval.
2. Has high tolerance for ambiguity, ambivalence, & frustration.
3. Is confident in conflict mgt & refereeing. (Has one who is uncertain, cautious of abilities to be helpful, & will communicate fears to others, & will tend to move all parties to a more defensive position).
4. Is not an advocate for any particular solution, does not take sides on the issues in the conflict.
5. Is credible to all sides.



2. I wish to see

3. Do you have any other points to be discussed, does not take time on the issues in the conference.

4. Do you have any other points to be discussed, does not take time on the issues in the conference.

5. Do you have any other points to be discussed, does not take time on the issues in the conference.

6. Do you have any other points to be discussed, does not take time on the issues in the conference.



## Referees Assumptions

1. Conflict is inevitable & resolvable.
2. Conformity is not required.
3. Few situations are hopeless.
4. One part affects another.
5. Each side probably has a piece of the truth.
6. There is some similarity bet. opponents.
7. Present problems are the ones to solve.
8. The process is of great importance.
9. There is no right answer.

Most ministers cannot referee in their own churches.

## Using an Outside Referee

Professionals, etc. Appendix 1.

## 1st Stage Conflict

1. Each person should be known abt what feels & thinks.
2. Anything said about conflict outside meetings <sup>should</sup> ~~must~~ be repeated in front of all participants.
3. Arguments must be specific & not generalized.
4. Name-calling is not helpful.





5. Each person will try to understand the other's point of view.

Avoid pontification, old assumptions, over-simplifications, simplicities, etc.

### Determine what info is needed

IDENTIFY the ISSUES! 1. What issues & problems are being worked on?

2. How do people feel abt. ea. other as persons?

CLARIFY the GOALS by what various parties. 3. What is context of fight?

What is extent of polarization  
unity of party more imp. than resp. decision-making.

A. Two-pole  
(lib vs consers.) etc.

B. Multiple parties

Age

Sex

Race/Ethnic

Ord/Laity

Office/ vs. non-officers

Theology (next world vs this world)

C. Shifting consistencies (heathenism)

5. What are the norms & values?

6. What is the past history?

7. What is indir. capability,

8. What time is available.

9. Can explosion be avoided

10. What is the potential cost of the conflict?



If not dealt  $\bar{c}$ , will it go away.  
If dealt  $\bar{c}$ , will ch. lose members?  
How many.

Can this assumption be tested

3. Search for alternatives

4. Covenant to fellow chosen alternatives.

Michael Dain

Intro N.T. (B-)

Comp. Rel. I+II

CVE

Church + Cult. I+II (Church Hist / Theol.)

Hist. Anc. Christianity

Ethical Chgs in Social Just. Mtn,





come along and be our rescuer. Meanwhile, back at the hovel, we had to deal with our daily lives and continued to sit in the ashes, being drugdes, and relishing it! My dear, never was anyone happier to be miserable than the Cinderella in all of us.

We sit there waiting for the Fairy Godmother to hear us crying about our situation and transform us into a princess (some of us, of course, have already been transformed into queens!) and send us off to the ball -- and periodically we do get a taste of what life could be like and we love it, because sometimes we are allowed to go to the ball, but then we turn back into pumpkins, or rats or the mice we really are, and it all goes away. Sometimes, we get lucky and the the gorgeous princess we met at the bar does come looking for us -- but most of the time we really don't get to keep our glass slippers, or the "Perfect Lover," or our ball gown -- it goes back to wardrobe, and props, and we go back to Central Casting. It was all a role we were playing.

A lot of us play these roles sitting around gay bars, where the Fairy Godmother comes in a bottle, and the dragon down the bar turns into a handsome prince, more handsome, drink by drink.

I think the thing I see in the Christmas story, especially in looking at Mary is that God didn't go looking for a God-bearer at the fanciest part of town, but God took the young woman, Mary, right where she was and left her right where she was, but made a tremendous change in her life without



This is a request sermon: Someone I'm very fond of in this congregation asked me to preach a "Fairy Tale" sermon. These are a group of sermons I began writing about the time I began preaching, and they are all based on theologically interpreted fairy tales, the first being "The Frog Prince," in which Jesus was the princess and we were the frog, transformed by Christ's love for us.

Of course, they are "Fairy Tales," what else would be the secular scriptures for M.C.C.??

~~So~~, today I want to use Cinderella for a parable. <sup>of Mary who</sup> ~~she~~ has good news and bad news for us. All of us at some time in our lives have been Cinderella. She is the part of us that is "no good" and chooses to live her life out under the mantepiece, sitting in the ashes, telling ourselves that if it weren't for our wicked mommy (or daddy) or that wicked queen (who may have been our first love) or whoever, we'd have been able to go to the ball (or to where life is a ball). Cinderella is all of us waiting to be rescued by Prince or Princess perfect, who will see the value in us through our rags and take us away from all this and off to the castle and to live happily ever after. Right?? So many of us, and particularly those of us who are women, have been raised that someone (back when we were kids -- some man) was going to come and change our lives. We sang about it as kids, "Some Day My Prince Will Come," and we sat there waiting for the "Perfect Lover" to come along and be our rescuer.

Meanwhile at the palace, where we had to deal with our daily lives, we continued to sit in the ashes, being drudges, and Oh my dear relishing it! Never was anyone happier to be miserable than the Cinderella in all of us.

One day, however, the fairy godmother heard us crying about our situation and transformed us into a fairy princess (no dear, not a queen) and sent us off to the ball -- and we got a taste of what life could be like -- and we loved it. Except, that when midnight came, we kept turning back into Cinderella, the pumpkin, and everything about us got mousy again. But the Prince did come looking for us -- for we had lost our glass slipper. Now what does all this mean.

For me, of course, the Fairy Godmother is an analogy for God. God who loves us, even when we're sitting in the ashes feeling sorry for ourselves. God who doesn't care how grimy our little souls are, but knows that underneath it all -- we're really good and whole and blessed, and transformable. And God sends us the Prince -- only the Hebrew words that we translate Prince of Peace really translate out to the one who rules in "Shalom". Shalom is a wonderful term, because it means fullness, wholeness, unbrokenness, and our Prince who really completes the transformation who loves us is the Prince of Shalom.

How many times we waste our lives waiting for the human who will





rescue us. We fall into a kind of Cinderella mentality that says "Someone will come along and see how wonderful I am and take me away from all this." But lovers come and lovers go, and we go on taking Cinderella with us into every new relationship, because we haven't experienced the transformation of the Fairy Godmother -- and become aware of how beautiful we really are, how extraordinarily beautiful we can become when we are touched by God. Not only does God beautify us, but all of our surroundings are changed. Our pump-kind, the rats and mice in our lives, all of it becomes transformed into beautiful people who surround us with goodness.

Then the "Ruler in Peace" or the "Bringer of Shalom" enters our life, and the transformation is completed because of the love which Jesus has for us, and eventually we do go off to the castle to live in harmony for ever. It is my contention that we can remain Cinderella (or if you will Sinderella), and keep on seeing ourselves as unworthy -- or we can claim God's love, be transformed, and live in harmony, shalom, forever, surrounded by beauty, love, and wholeness.

God, in Samuel, is telling David, that he (David) will be given a peaceful dominion, who changed David from the equivalent of Cinderella (shepherd) to the ruler, and gave him a castle. It's sort of the same story, if you look at it.

Mary, of course, is the penultimate Cinderella. There she was sitting quietly minding her own business -- until she was called out of her ashes to become the Theotoka (the God-bearer), transformed if you will, into the one who would bear the "bringer of shalom".

If God could take her from the ashes, and make of her "Queen of Heaven," Theotoka, we too have a similar task. We, too, are the bearers of shalom. Who will bring shalom if we do not? Who will bear the Prince of Peace to others if we do not?





THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO CINDERELLA:  
OR SOMEDAY MY PRINCE WILL COME

Almost with my first major sermon, a Sunday-after-Christmas sermon, a tradition began that I would preach a sermon from one of our secular scriptures, the Fairy Tales. The first was the Frog Prince, but there have been many others: The Emperor's New Clothes, The Three Little Pigs, Sleeping Beauty, and others. Somehow, in looking at tonight's scriptures a connection began to grow in my head that we needed to look at Cinderella.

Fairy Tales are not children's stories entirely, they are the remains, my professor told me, of the stories told around the fire in humanity's infancy. We have lost some of the symbols, but many of them can be recovered. Cinderella is one in which many of the symbols can be easily obtained. The Kore is a major symbol in folk and fairy tales. She is the purity symbol -- and in all fairy tales many things happen to her -- miraculous flights, journeys, visitations. Mary is a Kore figure. She is all of us in our innocence. Usually, the Kore is accompanied by a protective father, husband, lover, King, etc. Joseph is this figure. The Kore often has to work to protect her innocence by going through some challenging trial. Mary's pregnancy was this.

All of us, at times have been Cinderella. She is the part of us that feels "not good" about us, and chooses to live out our life in the ashes, telling ourselves if it hadn't been for wicked "so and so" -- Mommy, Daddy, the wicked queen (our first lover, maybe) (or our most recent one), we'd have been having a ball. Cinderella is all of us waiting to be rescued by the fairy godmother (or some fairy), and to be delivered to Prince or Princess Perfect, who will love us in spite of our rags and take us away from all this and off to the palace, where we will live happily ever after.

Right?? So many of us, particularly women but men, too, have been raised on Cinderella and have come to expect that someone is going to come and change our lives. And we spend years singing to ourselves "Someday My Prince Will Come." waiting for "The Perfect Lover" to







not that  
but in the  
Take a long day  
or two

Some of us are like that. Our lives aren't going too well + we make cosmetic changes: Get a new lover, get a new job, get a new wardrobe, lose weight. We just paint the piano. Sometimes it's risky to make the changes we need to make.

Nicodemus was a respected ~~leader~~ leader of his day. He was a high ranking Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council or court for the <sup>Jerusalem</sup> Jewish people. Nicodemus knew all about the law and most certainly he lived his life in the letter of the law. It is believed that Nicodemus was from a wealthy family. He was a good man. And he was a risk taker.

There was something about Jesus that intrigued Nicodemus. Despite his devotion to the ~~law~~ <sup>law</sup>, Nicodemus felt there was something missing in his life. (Have you ever been there?) Maybe this Jesus had what he needed. Nicodemus was becoming a closer Christian. One night after

all the people who were following Jesus <sup>had gone</sup> ~~went~~ home, Nicodemus met  $\bar{c}$  Jesus — just one on one. Nobody needed to know. Nicodemus was curious. He recognized Jesus as "a teacher who had come from God." In fact, Nicodemus told Jesus, "No one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Nicodemus believed Jesus was sent by God and wanted to find out more about him & his teachings.

When our lives aren't going as well as we'd like we need <sup>something</sup> ~~to do~~ more than <sup>to</sup> paint the piano.

Nicodemus came under cover of darkness to speak  $\bar{c}$  the Teacher. Being a respected leader of Judaism he had to be careful  $\bar{c}$  whom he was seen  $\odot$  Nicodemus felt safe as he made his way thru the darkness to meet  $\bar{c}$  Jesus. He felt that Jesus could keep him full the void in his life. Jesus told Nicodemus "very truly,



I tell you, no one can see the D of G without being born from above. "Nicodemus misunderstood. "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb & be born?"

"No one can enter the D of G," said Jesus "being born of the spirit & water."

we had an opera singer <sup>chair</sup>

I grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church. It was pretty boring. The songs were <sup>stupid</sup> <sup>was</sup> okay, but the preaching was not meant for young people. Reformed Church people didn't dance, smoke, drink or applaud in church. They were very proper, and very <sup>calmness</sup> <sup>strict</sup> <sup>when I</sup> went to N.O. I found the Southern Baptists & thought I'd found freedom. But it was a false freedom. It worked as long as I didn't admit I was gay. I wasn't truly free until I found MCC. But that, too, was a ~~big~~ risk. Back when I joined MCC it was almost all gay men, very few women, and it was a risk for me

up to 1972 I went home from NO in 1972  
63 gay men I met from



I was like Peter, I <sup>about the</sup> felt "where could I go, you have the words of life"

to tell my feminist friends why I wanted to join a patriarchal religion that was just full of men. It was a risk, but I knew there had to be a place for me + other women who were also looking for something to believe in. It's always easier to play it safe + not acknowledge that we belong to Jesus and we live our lives according to his teaching.

Fr. Henri Nouwen, who wrote a marvelous book called The Wounded Healer, reflected on the story of Nicodemus, writing: I love Jesus but want to hold onto my own friends, even when they do not lead me closer to God. I love Jesus, but I want to hold on to my own independence, even when that independence brings me no real freedom. I love Jesus, but do not want to lose the respect of my colleagues, even tho' I know that their respect does not make me grow spiritually.

I love Jesus, but I do not want to give up my personal plans, even when those plans are often more to my glory than to the glory of God.

Upon reflection, Fr. Nouwen realizes, "So I am like Nicodemus, who came by night and said safe things about Jesus to his colleagues." Even a great Christian like Fr. Nouwen is sometimes content not to take risks.

There's an element of Nicodemus in all of us. It's easier to play it safe & keep Jesus in <sup>at</sup> <sup>a</sup> the distance than risk being identified as one of his followers.

For faith to be genuine it has to be our own. A preacher from a long time ago, Harry Emerson Fosdick, once said, "So many church goers are second-hand Christians. They have inherited it from their families, borrowed it from their friends, married it, taken it over like the cut of their clothes from

I found  
the fashions of their group." The  
real joy of being a gay Christian is  
that most of us are first hand Christians.  
We've been thrown out of churches  
so often that there isn't much  
left to borrow. We have to risk  
creating our faith all over. There's  
not much paint in painting  
the pious.

Nicodemus was struggling  $\pm$   
what Jesus told him. Again,  
Jesus told him, "You must be born  
from above." Nicodemus listened  
but still did not understand or  
still did not want to understand.  
He asked Jesus, "How can these  
things be?" Nicodemus knew  
deep in his heart that only a  
person sent by God could perform  
the change he needed.  
miracles. He had seen & heard  
what Jesus had done, but he  
wasn't willing to risk power  
& prestige. Jesus told him, "Very  
truly I tell you, we speak what we  
know and testify to what we have  
seen,



yet you do not receive our testimony."

Jesus told Nicodemus the truth.

Many of us have been hurt so badly by the church that we are afraid to risk commitment to anything, much less the X. The trouble is, we will never be whole again, unless we risk being hurt again.

Mother Teresa was interviewed on American television a few years ago.

She said, "We have reason to trust God because when we look at the + we understand how much Jesus loves us. It is wonderful to come to Jesus. That's why God made him, to be our bread of life, to give us life. And as his life comes new life. New energy, new peace, New joy! New everything. And I think that's what brings glory to God, and it brings peace." Then she said, "I've seen people suffer so much, & when they've been brought to God, it changes their whole lives. What would we risk for new energy,

we don't believe there is  
any church worth really following

Every closet  
comes <sup>to its own</sup>  
wine cellar <sup>from next page</sup> - then  
what would we risk for new energy,  
new peace, new joy, new everything?

That can be said for living a life  
of faith. It's when we face our fears  
our fears & take the risk we  
experience the joy of following  
Jesus, for faith + risk are inter-  
twined. It's only when we stretch  
the horizons of our lives, it's only  
when we venture away from  
the comfortable to follow X that  
faith takes on its true dimension.  
That's what Jesus was trying to  
tell Nicodemus. <sup>to see what meant</sup> ~~you~~ must be born  
from above, from the D of G, ~~you~~ <sup>we</sup>  
must risk a new beginning, ~~you~~ <sup>we</sup>  
must trust ourselves to a new  
birth in God to truly be part of  
the D of G. As long as we try to  
hold onto the old, as long as we  
are afraid to follow, as long as  
we are unwilling to risk our  
lives for God, we will not be  
part of God's great adventure. It's  
not a question of how much  
faith we have, as it is a question



we have to risk coming out / out of the comfortable but sometimes uncomfortable <sup>in the</sup> closet we have made for ourselves. Every closet has its own <sup>wine</sup> cellar, of how much of the faith we have that we are willing to risk.

I read somewhere about risk takers that "the world is afraid of the risk takers, the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the trouble-makers, the round pegs in the square holes, the ones who see things differently."

I think that's a fair description of the gay community. It's who we are.

John ends the story of Nicodemus with the quotation that most of us know by heart. It's the promise for us in the closing words of the story of Nicodemus. "For God so loved the world that he gave the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>and I always add</sup> For Jesus <sup>the next</sup> came into the world not to condemn <sup>the</sup> world, but that the world <sup>there</sup> <sup>him</sup> might be saved."



Stop trying to paint the old piano.  
Take a risk & find new energy,  
new joy, new peace, new everything."  
I know. I've been there.  
Amen.

Stop trying to prove the old pieces.  
This is better than being empty.  
New for, new place, new every thing.  
I know. Don't know there.  
Answer.

New Year Closing Service  
Ephraim  
1/2/11

## A New Vision

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Once a family was driving thru Kansas on vacation. 5yo Tyler was looking out the car window. "Boy" he said, "it's so flat out there, you can look farther than you can see!"

It's a great phrase - "you can look farther than you can see."

Remember George Bush, the elder? He was criticized for not focusing on long-term goals + strategies. The former president agreed he wasn't very big "on the vision thing." <sup>George was neither</sup> Now we see where lack of vision + planning got us. We need a new vision. The world needs a new vision. Critics of the war (and that's a lot of us) clamor for a new vision of how to bring these bloody conflicts to an honorable end. We look at threats of terrorism + long for a vision of peace with people of different ideologies.



Christians are being killed for their faith in Egypt & Iraq and we long for each of us to be able to worship as we please. Scientists are worried about climate change, as mudslides, floods, avalanches, hurricanes, & freezes in warm places upset the status quo and we look for a new vision to stave off the crisis of global warming. We are closing our church & we have to have a vision of who we are & what we will become without it. The vision thing. It's come home to us & it's important. & the church something important will be missing in our lives. If only we could see something we haven't seen before.

Let's talk about "vision":

Think about scraps of cardboard, old bricks, used tires and other cast offs. Trash heap? Eyesore? A professor at Auburn is a visionary behind an architectural firm that specializes in lovely, functional, low-cost buildings & homes for poor rural residents of Alabama.

Specifically, they turn scrap cardboard, old car parts, and tires + other castoffs into real homes. Last year some of his students built a chapel + community center for the residents of Mason's Bend, a tiny, rural town. 100 discarded car windows were used to make one wall of the center. Some of these homes which are donated to local residents are attractive enough to be featured in architectural magazines. The difference between trash + building materials is vision. Isaiah says "without a vision the people perish." Nothing happens to a vision. 10 years ago we met on Nancy + Dennis's deck + took a vote to start a church. We had a vision. Over the years we touched many lives. Some left because we were too political. Some left because of distance + illness. Some left because of misplaced power issues. And some caught the vision + stayed to the very end.

In ~~the~~ 6<sup>th</sup> + 7<sup>th</sup> CBC the planets Jupiter, Saturn + Mars were very



close together, looking like one bright star. Most scholars agree that either the one in 6 or the one in 7 produced the bright glow that the Magi followed when they came to Bethlehem 2000 yrs ago. You heard the story just a few minutes ago. What fascinates me is this: hundreds of thousands of other people living in that part of the world saw the same bright light in the sky. Why didn't they leave their homes to go find the royal prince? What was different about the Magi - Vision!

First of all, the magi were searching for something ~~real~~<sup>real</sup>, something that would transform their lives. God loves searchers. And for a while we will all be searchers looking for a new way to praise God & feel at home in a church.

An apple computer ad in 1997 celebrated the searchers of the world. It went like this: "Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They are not fond of rules & they have no respect for the status quo.



You can praise them, disagree with them, quote them, disbelieve them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things." MCC has changed things since its founding in B'ham. There are now 3 Baptist churches, 3 Methodist churches, ~~to~~ 3 UCC's, & the Unitarian & Unitarian churches who all accept gay members. In some way we have done what MCC said it would do when it was started in 1968. We have put ourselves out of business.

I love the Beatles + John Lennon. He was a visionary. He never completely found what he was looking for, + it's easy to see why. Remember his song, "Imagine"

"Imagine no possessions; I wonder if you can;

No need for greed or hunger; a brotherhood of man,"

His vision was a radical one - & it offended many people. He envisioned no countries, no religion, no private possessions;

Nothing to divide people from one another.  
Nothing to fight over or die for. Only peace  
+ love + mutual benefit. He's was a  
secular vision.

His vision isn't that much different  
from the biblical vision of the D of G  
except that Lennon omitted God. I  
wonder how he thought humanity - with  
all its sinful ways - could produce such  
a world  $\bar{s}$  God.

A different kind of vision is found in  
Mersey Me's contemporary song: "I can  
Only Imagine." We played it at Eddie's  
funeral. It's a vision of what it would  
mean to be in God's presence.

I mention these two songs because of  
the similarity of the words "Magic" +  
"imagination." Imagination is from  
the word image - meaning a form or a picture -  
+ has descended to us from the Latin  
Imago, which in its turn was derived  
from an old Semitic root "mag" the same  
root word for "Magic."

Thursday is Epiphany - the 12<sup>th</sup> day  
of Christmas and is a celebration of the  
coming of the Magi.

An epiphany is a new way of seeing or understanding. It's appropriate that we begin a new year - an epiphany - a new way of seeing, a vision, an image of what the world can be, of what our lives can yet be. Like the magi of old, we have become searchers & to survive we have to open our minds, & stretch our imaginations.

Konrad Adenauer, German Chancellor, put it this way: "We all live under the same sky, but we don't all have the same horizon." Today we expand our horizons & begin a new year in a new place. ~~It's appropriate that we begin a new year - an epiphany, a vision,~~ we have become searchers. And there is danger. The world is afraid of "the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently." I think that's why the world is so afraid of gay people. We need to go out prepared. Remember Jesus, our founder - they crucify such people.



Someone once said, "Those who dance appear insane to those who cannot hear the music."

We cannot be so content in the things of this world that we no longer <sup>HUNGER</sup> for a fresh encounter in God. The Magi were researchers who set out on a journey of faith. There are many journeys we take. As gay people we journey into many different kinds of lifestyle. We are not all alike, even if we are gay. Some of us have journeyed into drugs, some into & out of alcohol. The magi had a specific goal in mind for their journey. We find it in the first verse of our lesson for the day: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem & asked, 'Where is the One who has been born a King of the Jews?' We saw his star in the east & have come to worship him" They were wise, indeed. And we must be, too. We need to be sure we are not following false stars. As we close Bethel, I want to challenge you

to set out on a journey of faith this new year. Get deep into your faith. You have a good beginning. You know the stories from having heard them Sunday by Sunday. Join another church. Get involved in it. Spend some time in prayer every day. Focus on God's purpose for your life. The Magi were searchers on a journey of faith. Their goal was to bow before a newborn king.

And when they found him, they bowed before him + offered gifts of gold, frankincense & myrrh. These were expressive gifts.

Maybe that's why we think of them as kings. Sometimes the gifts are spoken of symbolically. Gold to represent royalty, incense as an homage to God, myrrh to represent his death on a cross. Perhaps — we don't know. We also don't know what became of the gifts.

Maybe Joseph paid them to finance their perilous journey to Egypt. The Bible doesn't say. And it doesn't matter. The gifts represent the Magi's devotion. They gave of themselves. This is the key

to life. Give. Give of yourself. Give  
of yourself to God. Give of yourself  
to others.

There it is. It is our closing worship.  
We will not forget each other, even  
tho we will be seeing life in new eyes.  
The "vision thing." Seeing in the world  
new possibilities. Seeing in the church  
new possibilities. That is what I wish  
for each of us this day. The magi came  
searching. Their search took them on a  
journey of faith. When they found the  
baby Jesus they offered gifts, gifts that  
represented the best that was in them.  
You each have gifts to offer. Many gifts.  
Use them wisely to make a new start in  
your faith journey. This is the kind of  
vision we need as we begin a new  
year in new places - a vision to build  
a new life & even a new world.

I did not get to say it, but Merry Xmas  
& Happy New Year & good journeying from  
here to there - wherever there is.

Amen



2. Myra (1871-1872)

Myra was born in 1871 and was  
the daughter of the late  
John and Mary (nee) Smith.

She was educated in the  
public schools of the city  
and later attended the  
University of Chicago.

Myra was married to  
John (1873-1874) and they  
had one son, John (1875-1876).

Myra was a member of the  
Episcopal Church and was  
active in the church's  
work.

She died in 1872 and was  
buried in the family  
grave.



# I Always Wanted to Be A Boy

1. 10 yo keeping boy's pants & dressing up when no one was around.

2. The back veranda at the NY public library. Being only 9th and taken care of by gay guys who bought me soup or a donut and coffee.

Run away at 13

3. Going thru HS wearing a skirt, boy's white shirt & a boy's tweed jacket and getting cat calls "Half man - half woman!" HS was hell then for gay kids, today it still is for LGBT & kids. Nothing has changed that.

4. ~~Being~~ Getting thrown out of Doris because 4 of us went to hear Dinah Washington <sup>A.3</sup> gay bars in the 50's, on McDougal Street.

5. Getting fired for alcoholism & seeing a psychiatrist for 7 years. Years later, "If I had known the what I know now about sexuality I would have counselled you differently."



"Good, where do I leave 3 children & I want my 10 then back."

6. Being a gay parent by choice at a time when it was not a popular thing. Gay man best friend "gene pool."

~~8. One of first white~~

Beginning activism at Tulane where there was a fledgling gay student's union. <sup>lost in hit</sup> class.

7. Helen's epilepsy on school yard and Mrs. Smith's "I ~~don't care~~,"

"As far as I know Helen had sun stroke & I don't care about your living situation. You are 2 of my best teachers & I don't want to lose you."

9. ~~"Upper room" story.~~ Intro to MCC "Can I curse you for Jesus." upper room gay bar. State exp + blonde boy lover "I'm going to burn this place down."

10. Activism ended relationship w Helen. Going home to N.Y. Forst gay pride march, watching as

3rd. Marching - pinning "I am a  
Christian" pin on protestors' pants  
7 foot banners. 2nd: Carrying banner  
parade massed ~~able to be able to~~ <sup>He of</sup> ~~side behind.~~

11. Gay QWL. Chaining myself to  
the city hall fence to protest non-  
passage of gay rights ordinance.

12. MCC <sup>in second</sup> ~~first~~ parade "God is a  
Dyke's Best Friend" to shirts. \*

13. MCC student clergy. Testify-  
ing at City Council. Messy in  
bursts, ma <sup>clerked</sup> <sup>collor</sup> tears + city councilor. "We lost  
this time, but we will win."

14. Getting involved in Women's  
Movement. Inclusive language.  
"Church Burning." Adding 45  
women to the 63 men + the  
accusation "Women are  
taking over the church."

15. Told I was too controversial  
to be ordained. Sent to Boston  
as head of Women's Ministry.  
Amata Bryant coming to Boston  
all over TV Radio. KKK north  
"I know you + I would <sup>with B'nai Soc.</sup>  
rent to you." "If you knew  
us, you would rent to <sup>any</sup>  
of us." Death Threats by  
John Birch Society for 6 months.



First time in RI  
Beating potatoes for Dec 1 Conf.

16. Providence RI. Church members fighting. Elected on the spot RI gay pioneer.
17. Pastor in Calif, hated it. Called back to Boston as Sr. Pastor. Beginning HIV work on "Mayor's Task Force on AIDS."
18. Leaving pastorate "too conservative." Going to Pensacola, "too liberal." Going to Mobile.
19. Full AIDS crisis. First HIV-AIDS group in Alabama, Shirley & I - soc. wkrs & chaplain.
20. Going to Atlanta so Shirley could get MSW. Burying almost one a week while there.
21. Shirley is recruited as first MSW at BAO. I back up Keith Morrison at Covenant. John Hawken & I step in when he dies & am elected pastor. Active in during 9 years at Covenant. No one else speaking for the GLBTQ community. Retiring at 81, and you never retire.  
"Let's get her while we can."



Let me close w a Bible story—

Luke story. Storm on Sea of Galilee

"Jesus, 'Didn't you care if we  
perish?' Jesus calms the storm.

and asks "Where is your faith?"

The point: Jesus is in the boat

w you. Why are you afraid?

Take this away w you. No matter  
how frightening it is to come out  
or take a stand, don't be afraid.

No matter the storm: Jesus is in  
the boat w you. You have no  
reason to fear.

I kept a reg<sup>ular</sup> job for 45 years  
along w MCC <sup>pastors</sup> & never  
got fired. They knew I'd sue  
'em or take it to the media,  
where I always had good friends  
cause I was "good copy."









14<sup>th</sup> Pentecost  
New Orleans  
1/5/17

"Time To do Something About the Piano"  
John 3:1-17

In the 1960's & early 1970's I lived in New Orleans. I was one of the first white teachers in the previously all-black school system. I loved living in New Orleans. I owned a house not too far from here on Lowerline just off St. Charles. I was a student at Tulane, first undergraduate & then Master's in History.

My first time in New Orleans was at Mardi Gras in 1946. I arrived in the middle of the night & of course there were no hotel rooms to be had. There was an <sup>infamous</sup> bar in those days called ~~the~~ on Bourbon called \_\_\_\_\_ the back room had an old grand piano. I was so tired after a 3 day bus trip from my home in NY that seeing the back room dark & the piano there, I climbed up on the piano and fell asleep. I woke up to someone subtly

playing the piano and as  
I looked over the top of it  
saw a young woman about  
my age. She smiled & said  
"What would you like to  
hear?" We often would  
return to the place where  
we met and she would play  
that piano. She always said  
she hated that piano because  
some of the keys didn't work,  
the pedals stuck & it sure was  
an old ugly piano. People who  
used the piano would complain to  
the owner and one day with a  
broad smile he said "I did  
something about the piano"  
He had painted the piano.



14 Hentecost  
New Orleans

11/5/17

## Time To do Something about the Piano

In the 1960's + early 1970's I lived in New Orleans, very near here on Lowerline just off St. Charles. I was one of the first white teachers in the previously all-black school system.

When I met my first lover, <sup>in 1946</sup> I was 17 and had hitch hiked to NO from NY. It had taken 3 days + I was exhausted. It was Mardi Gras eve. I had asked a cab driver if there was a gay bar + he took me to Chartres + St Phillip where there was a bar called "The Personality Room". It was one of the bars that had big easy chairs + was pitch dark. Gay bars were in those days. You did not want to see anyone's face, so that if you saw them on the street you could honestly say you didn't recognize them.

I fell asleep in one of those chairs and was slowly roused from sleep by someone softly playing the

piano I had seen along the back wall. I would learn later that that piano was barely playable. Weekly there was a kind of amateur night & people would play, sing, bring guitars and have fun being entertained by people in the community. The bars were all we had. There were no political groups, no churches — there were the bars. This was about what we had for community.

Charlene always said she hated that piano & wished she could bring her own piano like the folk singers brought their own guitars.

~~Finally one day we~~  
Everybody complained about the piano & one day we were surprised to find that the owner had done something. He painted the piano.

That's so typical of us. When things are out of tune & our lives are not going too well, we make cosmetic changes. We look for a new lover, get a new job (if we can), add to our wardrobe, lose a little weight, we paint the piano! It's too risky to make the change we need to make.

Nicodemus was a respected leader of the Jewish community. He was a high-ranking Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council & court for the Jewish people. The itinerant preacher had come to his attention & his task was to see if this young man was preaching a message that was safe in a very dangerous situation. Nicodemus knew the law. He had most certainly lived his life by the letter of Torah. He was a good man. The Pharisees were the good guys, they believed in the <sup>Torah</sup> ~~law~~ when many around them were not so faithful or were very dangerous <sup>living</sup> zealots.



the Pharisees just wanted to keep  
the Torah. What Nicodemus  
was about to do was dangerous.  
He was going to meet this  
young man that others were  
calling a Messiah. There  
were many "Messiahs"  
around at that time. Most of  
them were preaching revolt  
against Rome, but this man was  
different & he intrigued Nicodemus.  
Despite his position, Nicodemus  
wanted to know this man  
better. Nicodemus knew there  
was something missing in his  
life, something the Law was  
not giving him. There was  
an emptiness (have you ever  
been there?) Did this Jesus  
have what he had been seeking?  
Nicodemus had been listening.  
Was he becoming a closet  
Christian?

One night after all the  
people who had been following  
Jesus had gone home, Nicodemus

met Jesus - one on one - In the darkness of night he made his way to where Jesus was staying. He could say he was checking him out for the Sanhedrin if anyone saw him, but actually he was curious. It was a risk but he wanted to know. He recognized Jesus as "a teacher who had come from God." In fact, he told Jesus "no one can do these signs you do apart from the presence of God." Nicodemus believed Jesus was sent by God & he wanted to know more.

When our lives are not going well we'd like to do more than paint the pains.

Nicodemus felt that Jesus could help him feel the word in his life. Jesus told Nicodemus "very truly I tell you no one can see the D of G without being born from above." Nicodemus misunderstood "How can one be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into his mother's womb & be born?"

"No one can enter the ~~Do G~~ Do G"  
Said Jesus "without being born of  
spirit & water."

I grew up in the Dutch Reformed Ch.  
It was pretty boring, <sup>very Calvinist</sup> My church had  
a professional choir, so the music  
was good, the preaching was not  
made interesting for children +  
the religion was very strict. One  
could not dance, smoke, drink or  
applaud in church. One had to  
be very proper + very quiet.  
When I came back to ND in the  
60's I found the Baptists + thought  
I'd found freedom. But it was a  
false freedom. It lasted as long as  
I did not admit I was gay.

One day my partner & I were  
sitting in an infamous lesbian  
bar, Alice Brady's, when a  
young man approached us,  
"Can I cruise you for Jesus?"  
That was my first acquaintance  
with MCE. I was too frightened  
to follow up on his question



I was a teacher & I was on staff  
at the Bapt Church in the CE dept. I  
was really not free until I got back  
to NY in 1973 and found the MCC quite  
accidentally. ~~I had asked if there~~ <sup>Someone told me there</sup> was  
a church gay people could go & not  
be afraid. It was the Church of the  
Beloved Disciple. It was high Lk  
orthodox & I just was not comfortable  
and someone there told me about  
MCC. I sort of recognized the name  
but did not realize it was the same  
church the young pastor had told me  
about at Alice Brady's

